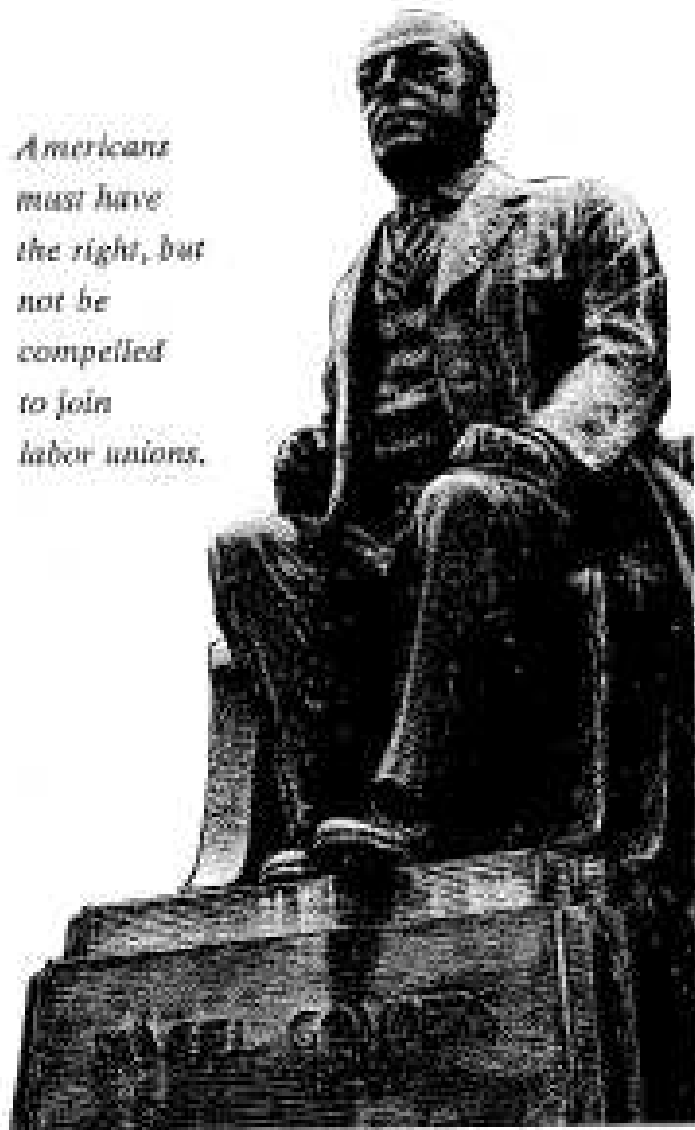


The Voluntarism of Samuel Gompers

*Americans
must have
the right, but
not be
compelled
to join
labor unions.*



“Although obviously a man of great personal pride and ambition, he had dedicated himself and all his abilities to service for his fellow workers. He wanted them to have what he valued most – individual liberty.”

FLORENCE CALVERT THORNE
(Forward, *Samuel Gompers: American Statesman*)

“Since freedom was the goal, voluntarism was the principle he advocated. Democracy to him meant responsible individuals living in a responsible society. Individual rights were the practical results of that way of life.

As president of the American Federation of Labor, Gompers could not compel any person or union to act contrary to his or their judgement. He depended on persuasion and education to build up a Federation held together by conviction and moral standards.

Voluntarism partly explains his emphasis on economic action in preference to legislative action”

WILLIAM GREEN
Then President of the AFL
(From *American Federationist*, January 1950)

“ . . . He founded the American Federation of Labor on the bedrock of voluntarism. Lenin called it a “rope of sand.” Gompers retorted that this rope of sand would prove more powerful than chains of steel. He believed with his whole soul in personal freedom, in democratic government and in the ultimate triumph of voluntary human cooperation over any form of compulsion or dictatorship.”

GEORGE MEANY
Then President of the AFL-CIO
(Forward, *Seventy Years of Life and Labor*, by Samuel Gompers)

SAMUEL GOMPERS, the courageous founder of the American labor movement, applied his basic ideals of voluntarism to all fields in which workingmen have interests. His singleness of purpose and undeviating philosophy gave force and meaning to his life and to the millions of Americans whose lives he has influenced.

Today that influence is wearing thin among the men and women entrusted with carrying on Gompers' mission. Instead of devotion to individual freedom, today's union officials rely almost solely on compulsion, coercion, threats, violence and intimidation in order to maintain "labor's structure." In every sense of the word, they have become the "tyrants" Gompers warned of.

The following quotations from his speeches and writings demonstrate clearly that most modern day union officials have forgotten – or indeed never accepted – Gompers' basic belief in the principle of voluntarism as the cornerstone of the trade union movement in America.

These quotations appear in the authoritative book *Samuel Gompers: American Statesman*, by Gompers' long time confidential staff assistant Florence Calvert Thorne and in *Seventy Years of Life and Labor*, Gompers' autobiography.

DEVOTION TO VOLUNTARISM

“I want to urge devotion to the fundamentals of human liberty – the principles of voluntarism. No lasting gain has ever come from compulsion. If we seek to force, we but tear apart that which, united, is invincible. . . . I want to say to you, men and women of the American labor movement, do not reject the cornerstone upon which labor’s structure has been builded – but base your all upon voluntary principles and illumine your every problem by consecrated devotion to that highest of all purposes – human well being in the fullest, widest, deepest sense.”

(From “Gompers’ Creed,” Gompers’ last AFL convention)



“The workers of America adhere to voluntary institutions in preference to compulsory systems which are held to be not only impractical but a menace to their rights, welfare and their liberty.”

(From *American Federationist*, April, 1916)



“There may be here and there a worker who for certain reasons unexplainable to us does not join a union of labor. This is his right no matter how morally wrong he may be. It is his legal right and no one can dare question his exercise of that legal right.”

(From an address before the Council on Foreign Relations, December 10, 1918, *American Federationist*, February, 1919)

EQUAL RIGHTS AND HUMAN FREEDOM

“The American labor movement is not partisan to a political party; it is partisan to a principle, the principle of equal rights and human freedom.”

(Page 122, 1908 Convention Proceedings)



“That which we call freedom, that which we call liberty, are not tangible things. They are not handed to any people on a silver platter. They are principles, they are questions of the spirit, and the people must have a consciousness that they not only have the term liberty and freedom, but they must have the power and the right to exercise these great attributes of life.”

(From an address to the National Security League,
Chicago, September 14, 1917)



“I believe that restrictions dwarf personality and that largest usefulness comes through greatest personal freedom.”

(Samuel Gompers in his autobiography,
Seventy Years of Life and Labor)

ON BEING A UNION 'LEADER'

“There are people in the labor movement who seem to believe that success can only come by entrusting great, yes, absolute power in the hands of an individual or an executive officer. I warn you against a calamity none greater than which can occur to the labor movement. Autocracy is as dangerous in our movement as in the state. Mistakes may be made by the masses but they learn to do better by reason of their mistakes. The individual, on the contrary, when having absolute power rarely makes mistakes, rather commits crime. The man who would arrogate to himself in the labor movement absolute and autocratic power would be a tyrant under other circumstances and has no place in the labor movement.”

(From “President’s Report,” 1888 Convention Proceedings)



“We believe that we were the servants of the working people, obliged to do their bidding, and not to arrogate to ourselves the functions of dictators, directing our fellow working people.”

(From “President’s Report,” 1888 Convention Proceedings)

“Your idea seems to be that an executive officer of an organization should be their ‘leader.’ You do not seem to understand that a leader implies followers, and that where there are leaders and followers there are dupers and duped. You do not know that our movement is based upon the recognition of the sovereignty of the worker; that when they declare for a purpose, they’re presumed to mean what they say, and to act in accordance with it; that they require their executive officer, not to lead them, but to execute their will.”

(From a letter to W. H. Milburn of the *Denver Post*, 1896)



“There is no power vested in the officers of the Federation. They can act in an advisory capacity: they can suggest; they can recommend. But they can not command one man in all America to do anything. Under no circumstances can they say, ‘You must do so and so,’ or, ‘You must desist from doing so and so.’”

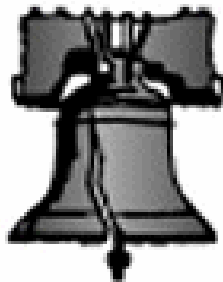
(From *American Federationist*, December, 1913;
abstract of testimony, House Lobby Investigation Committee)

The National Right to Work Committee is a coalition of employers and employees organized in 1955 with a single purpose: protecting the rights of individual workers to join or not to join a union without losing their jobs. The National Right to Work Committee believes that all Americans must have the right but not be compelled to join labor unions.

The National Right to Work Committee led the fight in 1965-1966 to preserve Section 14(b) of the Taft-Hartley Act and has been largely responsible for defeating efforts since then to enact phony labor law reform, construction forced unionism bills, common situs picketing bills, pushbutton strike bills, and other efforts to impose compulsory unionism on farm workers, public employees and postal workers.

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*Good Unions Don't Need Compulsory Unionism;
Bad Unions Don't Deserve It*