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SHREWD SAMUEL.

WE must confess that old Sam Gompers has us guessing. We don't know how to take him, nor does anybody else. There are those who would picture the powerful labor leader as the personification of all that is patriotic; others speak of the man as the "Great American Menace." Between these two extremities of opinion no two citizens can agree as to how to classify the crafty president of the American Federation of Labor. It is difficult to fix his position on any given proposition; he is too shifty for that—and therein would seem to lie his chief strength. Whatever else he may be, it goes without saying that he is the shrewdest dealer in the game today. He is the David Harum of American politics at the present moment, and we doubt that there is any man in public affairs today who can best him in a political trade.

All of which observations lead to the conclusion that Gompers is a power to be reckoned with in American politics this year and, if he lives, for years to come. Just what his ultimate plans embrace, no one knows for no one has as yet had a glimpse at his hole card. All signs point to concerted activity on the part of organized labor, and under his direction, in the approaching campaign, but whether the scheme involves a straight labor party movement or simply contemplates the exercise of the balance of power as between the two old line political parties, remains to be seen. Just now Gompers seems to have effected a very smooth working agreement with President Wilson and the probabilities are that organized labor will throw its support to the President's party this fall. That ought to prove a winning combination, provided somebody's foot doesn't slip.

But this speculation suggests itself: wherein will Gompers and his organization benefit? Or perhaps they have already become the beneficiary of the Administration. Come to think of it, Gompers' flock has had a fairly soft snap since the war began, compared with the boys in uniform and other classes of wage-earning citizens. While vociferously proclaiming their unconditional loyalty to the nation, they have nevertheless stoutly asserted their right to strike on such provocations as would seem to make a mockery of much of their professed patriotism.

It was not long since that the Senate of the United States, the sabotage measure being under consideration, had the courage to record a majority vote in favor of prohibiting labor strikes for the duration of the war. Then those daring senators heard from Samuel Gompers, who said in effect that Congress had no right to prohibit his satellites from striking whenever and wherever they pleased. What happened when old Sam cracked his whip? The Senate reversed itself and sent the sabotage bill on to the President, shorn of its original provision to prohibit and punish strikes that would interfere with the production of articles necessary to the winning of the war. As matters now stand, strikers need only assert that they seek a higher wage or improved working conditions to escape the restrictions of the law against sabotage. In some miraculous manner, Gompers managed to pull all the teeth out of the measure.

But he would have us believe that "labor stands back of the President of the United States." We have no disposition to doubt this claim so far as the great rank and file of labor is concerned; we believe that they will prove loyal to the core if their leaders will only let them alone. As for Samuel Gompers himself, we sometimes wonder whether, if he is really standing behind the President, he is not waving the flag with one hand and brandishing a club with the other.

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