

## Union Labor in the Congressional Campaign.

Organized labor has entered politics with no uncertain purpose. The American Federation of Labor, with its 1,500,000 union workmen of practically every known trade, seems to be standing squarely behind President Gompers in his challenge to the politicians.

Weeks before the republican and democratic congressional campaign committees were ready to actively open their respective campaigns the congressional campaign committee of the American Federation of Labor had established headquarters in Washington and was up to its ears in work. From every congressional district in which it is desirable, from the federation's viewpoint, to defeat a candidate, come reports of great activity on the part of organized labor and a solid front presented against the obnoxious candidate. In almost every instance the candidate marked for slaughter is a republican.

The entry of the American Federation of Labor into politics has been a possibility for years, but events since 1904 made it certain. Congress failed to broaden the eight-hour law as the federation wished it broadened. This law now prohibits the employment on public works of the United States of any laborers for more than eight hours a day. Public works, according to the present ruling of the department of justice, are "permanent improvements on property owned by the government."

What the federation demands from congress is a law which will compel in all government contracts, except for transportation, communication and the like, a stipulation that the contractor shall not work his laborers more than eight hours a day.

In addition, the federation desires and has long been fighting for the enactment of an anti-injunction law and an anti-convict labor law, and it has strong leanings toward and great sympathy with the movement for the establishment of the initiative and referendum, by which the people may instruct their representatives in congress as to action on vital questions.

The American Federation of Labor maintained a strong lobby in Washington to press its demands at the last session of congress, but congress failed to enact any of the desired legislation.

The opposition came almost wholly from republican members, by the hostile attitude of Speaker Cannon and the administration. Democratic members, almost without exception, declared themselves favorable to this legislation, but their support counted for little while the indifferent and hostile republicans are in so great a majority.

After repeated appeals to the house committee on labor to act on the measures dear to the heart of union labor, the federation presented to the president, to the president of the senate and the speaker of the house its "bill of grievances." In this the house committee was alleged to be "packed" against the interest of labor, and notice was given that unless favorable action was taken organized labor would march to the polls next November and vote against every candidate for congress who did not pledge his support to the desired measures.

President Roosevelt, it is said, was inclined to be critical of the sweeping legislative demands of the federation. He was charged with reading the representatives of that body something of a lecture. But the next day his attitude changed, and since then he has taken steps, quite approved by the federation, vigorously to enforce the existing eight-hour law.

Speaker Cannon is said to have replied to the complaints of the federation with some asperity and to have sought to ignore the labor legislative propaganda.

The attitude of the administration in determining to employ Chinese coolies in the work of constructing the Panama canal has further incensed organized labor against the republican party.

In consequence, labor is enlisted for the war in many congressional districts. It seems to be devoting its most strenuous attention to the district of Congressman Littlefield, in Maine. That gentleman, who wields a strong influence with the majority in congress, was particularly cocky and offensive in his opposition to the federation's demands. It is reported from Lewiston, Me., the leading city in his district, that he is engaged in a struggle for his political life. President Gompers has gone to Maine to take the stump against him, and there are other influential labor and democratic speakers combined to work his political undoing.

The Maine congressional elections are held several weeks earlier than the regular date for holding congressional elections elsewhere in the country, and the labor leaders are counting much on the moral effect of Littlefield's defeat. The labor speakers who are shelling the woods in his district now will later go to Speaker Cannon's Illinois district to try to take the political scalp of "Uncle Joe."

It is an interesting fight, and if Littlefield and Cannon fall outside the breastworks, the next session of congress will probably lend a patient ear to the next "bill of grievances" presented by organized labor.