

Industrial Organization

THE interesting and combative article by Frank Jackson in the January *Plebs* makes one wonder why he has ignored the extensive movement for the amalgamation of the unions in the Engineering Industry. A report is to hand of a Rank and File Conference on Amalgamation held at Leeds on November 11th and 12th, 1916. 124 delegates representing Trades Councils, Trades Unions, Trade Union Branches, &c. from all parts of the country, met to discuss what could be done to form the kind of union which he advocates. The result of that conference is conveyed in the model resolution for Trade Union Branches which reads as follows :—

“ That the members of—Branch of the —, realising that section-ism is useless, demand that the executive of the various Unions immediately get together for the purpose of formulating a practicable scheme of amalgamation, and that the preliminary conference be held before the second week in February 1917.

“ We further agree that the A.S.E. shall be the organization to convene the first conference, and that the following shall be the basis of discussion :—

(a) That the title of the Union after amalgamation be the Engineering and Shipbuilding Workers' Industrial Union.

(b) That the Industrial Union shall embrace every worker in the Industry, regardless of craft, grade, or sex.

(c) That all friendly society benefits shall be entirely separate from the Industrial side of the movement.

(d) That representation on all administrative bodies shall be occupational- not geographical.

(e) That each district branch and craft group shall have complete autonomy consistent with efficient and effective organization ; control of policy and action to be vested in the workshop.

(f) That the definite object of such union shall be to secure complete control of the Industry for the abolition of the wages system."

Here at least there seems to me to be a recognition by engineers of the force of the criticism made by F.J., and a distinct attempt to raise out of the present muddle a more unified organization.

But there still appears to me to be something lacking, and in the hope that a discussion will ensue and the air be cleared somewhat with regard to ideas on organization, I wish to raise certain further points. It is time we really understood what it is we are after. There has not yet been made a real distinction between organization by Industry and Industrial Unionism. The first is based upon Industrial occupation. The second is based upon a *class* basis and implies the union of industrial workers, conveying in my opinion ideas of a completely different form of organization.

We have repeatedly proclaimed the class struggle and called upon the workers to organize politically and industrially upon that basis, arguing effectively that all workers have one thing in common to fight- *i.e.*, exploitation by means of the wages system ; and it is *upon that basis* we should proceed to organize. This implies that wherever there are workers they should get together on that basis. It is true that workers have peculiar interests as well as common interests. But whether national organization on the basis of their peculiarities (their trade or occupation) is going to satisfactorily meet the situation is altogether questionable. It seems to me that, in view of modern developments in the capitalist mode of production, the great occupational unions will be faced with a repetition of grievances with which the trade unions of to-day have to contend.

The engineering workers in particular are in for a very interesting time, conflicting as they will with the miners, the railwaymen, the builders, &c., as mechanical improvements extend to all spheres of industry. The intermingling of occupations in modern large businesses is a very significant development, which we must take into account when considering problems of organization. Specialization exists to a very large extent in every part of industry, it is true. But with the large concentration of capital there is a tendency to make each capitalist concern self-contained. Concentration on one particular form of production is one stage in the competitive race ; but, as the monopoly position is reached, the

business begins to encroach upon those other forms of production upon which it is somewhat dependent.

An armament firm, for example, concentrates on armour plate, makes a success, turns to gun production, then to transport, motor-cars, &c., reaches out at rubber, develops plant to produce its own gas, utilises the by-products, starts repairing its own engines and then produces them, builds its own workshops, offices, and so forth; until within a single plant you have bricklayers, masons, joiners, patternmakers, moulders, navvies, painters, cabinet-makers, mechanics, chemists, &c., &c. In every direction there is an increasing intermingling and interdependence of the workers.

The only form of organization yet introduced which will in my opinion meet the demands of the day and answer the case for a real democratic organization on a class basis is that introduced in the form of Workers' Committees. Here is an outline of their structure and a statement of their principles:—

(a.) The workers in each shop should elect shop stewards, skilled, semi-skilled, unskilled, women workers, each electing their stewards according to the number in the shop. These stewards form the shop committee.

(b.) Each shop committee should elect a convenor to be the delegate to the district meeting of delegates, the workers committee, held at least once in four weeks.

(c.) The district meeting of delegates should elect a sub-committee to deal with correspondence and matters financial, &c.

(d.) The delegates should call a meeting of shop stewards immediately after a district meeting to enable all information to be immediately circulated among all the workers in the shop.

(e.) This organization to proceed in every plant irrespective of industry.

(f.) From each district should be elected delegates to a National Workers' Committee, to make possible the fullest application of organized labour as occasion demands.

(g.) No elected bodies should have executive powers. The functions of all committees being those of dissemination of information and the co-ordination of workshop with workshop, district with district. The determination of policy to be vested in the rank and file.

Modifications according to district peculiarities are to be expected. But the principles upon which the above proposals are based are sound. They challenge the election of people to tell us what we have to do, and this procedure seems to be as far as any organization has yet progressed towards democracy! They invest the rank and file with responsibility and in doing so affirm the principles that the workers have the incontestible right to control their own affairs and determine their own destiny. J. T. MURPHY