

"Economic value and function of Trades Unions"
by
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Trade unions were first organized in England. These like the guilds sprang up as a defense against the capitalist. Combinations and associations resembling trade societies existed in England before fifteen hundred and sixty two, but the existence of a continuous association of wage-earners for the purpose of improving the conditions of their employment did not exist until about the year seventeen hundred. Some have spoken of the trade unions as being successors to the guilds. While they may be successors to the guilds it does not necessarily mean that they sprang from these institutions. The necessity for some organization of the wage-earners was enough reason for such an organization. The essential cause of the growth of durable associations of wage-earners must lie in something peculiar to the century. This fundamental condition of trade unionism we discover in the economic revolution through which certain industries were passing. In all cases in which trade unionism arose the great bulk of the workers had ceased to be independent producers.

When first organized some trade unions were incorporated by charter, some of the trades were subject to statute and others were free from any restrictions either by charters or Acts of Parliament. The woolen manufactures were the principal trade of England. This trade or as it was first called, a crafts guild, was regulated by statute. The use of machinery, the number of looms, and the rate of wages was

regulated by these laws. In seventeen hundred and twenty five combinations in woolen manufactories were prohibited. The statutory rates of wages seem to have not been used. As a result a strike ensued which consisted of violent riots. Peace was reestablished by the masters agreeing with the workmen. The legislature still maintained the old laws and these conflicts did not lead at once to the formation of permanent trade unions. These were later brought into existence by the transition from the domestic to the factory system. In the eighteenth century the woolen manufactories were carried on by small masters in their own homes. Each one of these had served as an apprentice for seven years. Each master employed from ten to twelve journeymen. The master himself taught the apprentice his trade and they were in close companionship and understood each other well.

The introduction of machinery made a complete change in things. The many things that formerly the master had done in his own private shops were taken to public mills and done by machinery. With this sprang up a division of labor. There also existed in England some rich merchants who erected mills and became wholesale manufacturers. This was the beginning of what is known as the factory system.

The trades that were regulated by charter were very similar to the other trades. The charter was a body

of laws that regulated the trade for which the company had obtained the charter. These laws were abused and the people were oppressed to poverty and despair. The strikes that occurred were very violent resulting in a great loss of life and property. By eighteen hundred and fourteen the workmen entered into a union formed of all branches of trades and efforts were made from time to time to secure a list of fixed prices. The trade of the framework of knitting and those existing among the cutlers of Sheffield were the principal ones of this type.

The printers and compositors were among the first who combined for their protection without any restrictive laws of Parliament. The laws within these trades were regulated as the trade might see fit except, the number of apprentices and these were governed by custom as well as by law. The regulation of wages as it was in the case of other trades became the question of dispute and strife. Malicious and violent acts ensued. Petitions were sent to Parliament but of little avail. The trades were refused legal protection and as a result secret trade unions were organized.

The period in which the factory system existed is one of horrible misery and oppression. The people lived in dingy, foul, tumbled down houses. The day's work was lengthened to sixteen and eighteen hours. The moral conditions that existed were intolerable and children as well as men and women were forced to work in the

factories amidst the confusion of vice and debauchery. As a result their minds were crippled as well as their bodies. Being neither protected by law or by trade unions it seemed that the greatest burdens fell upon the women. While the factory hands were suffering untold misery, the miners were in a still worse condition than they. The factory hands lived in sight of civilization and saw a little of it once in a while but the miners were huddled together in little out of the way villages and all of their work was underground. In the year eighteen hundred and forty four a strike ensued and people were awakened to the terrible condition of the laboring people. The workmen themselves also seemed to realize that they must have better conditions in which to live.

In eighteen hundred and twenty four trade unions became lawful and this date marks the great revolution for the betterment of the condition of laborers. Trade unions sprang up in all parts of the country. Unfortunately at this time many of the unions were inexperienced and were not as wisely conducted as they would have been if they had understood the condition of affairs better. A terrible commercial depression occurred from eighteen hundred and twenty five to eighteen hundred and twenty nine and for the time being the unions seemed to do little or no good but the

germ of industrial revolution was kept alive and has been successful in relieving labor. About eighteen hundred and forty three the unions recovered from the great depression and what is known as modern trade unions were then established. The employers still remained hostile. They said they did not object to local unions but that they opposed national organization. In the National Association of United Trades strikes were opposed and the good understanding of the employers were sought. Politics was eliminated from the organization except in such questions where definite labor aims were involved.

Notwithstanding that the unions were broader in their views, it seemed that this improvement antagonized the employer and that they exercised more tyranny than before. In eight hundred and fifty two the employer locked out the entire trade and after a struggle which lasted about three months the labours were obliged to submit and return to their work.

The Amalgamated Society of Engineers survived this lockout and is a type of many of the unions that exist in England today. The early unions were local, loosely combined; each controlling its own funds and making its own laws but the Amalgamated Engineers were organized on national lines and was strengthened at the expense of the locals. They established a benefit

funds by making the dues a shilling. Other trades
 organized similar unions and from eighteen and fifty
 two to eighteen hundred and fifty nine the unions
 developed rapidly. Strikes seemed to be a thing of
 the past but on account of the crisis of eighteen
 hundred and fifty seven which caused an industrial
 depression strikes were again resorted to. In
 eighteen hundred and sixty seven a Royal
 Commission was appointed to investigate the
 alleged outrages, but the unions as a whole withstood
 the rigorous investigations without a stain. Instead of laws
 being made to depress them, in eighteen hundred and
 sixty nine a law was passed that protected their
 funds and in eighteen hundred and seventy nine
 their objects and acts were legalized. The right of
 suffrage was given disfranchised workmen by the
 Reform bill of eighteen hundred and sixty six.
 Many reforms and advances were made during
 this period. The membership increased rapidly
 and the year eighteen hundred and seventy four
 is particularly noteworthy by reason of the great
 increase in unions. But this period was followed
 by another industrial depression in eighteen hundred
 and seventy eight. Many people were thrown out
 of employment. The unions began to realize
 that unskilled workmen must also be organized.

The Dock Strike in eighteen hundred and nine was an astonishing success. It proved that the principles of trade unionism were general and that unskilled labor was more able to organize than ever before. Since then until the present time the trade unions have grown with astonishing rapidity both in numbers and in power.

Trade unionism in the United States first existed about the year eighteen hundred and three and at that time were very few and only local. It was not until about eighteen hundred and fifty that national organizations were formed. The growth of unions from eighteen hundred and three until about the close of the Civil War did not increase rapidly and their effect on labor was not apparent. From eighteen hundred and fifty to the present time the growth of manufacturing and mining communities has furnished excellent opportunity for the growth of trade unions. The number of laborers employed in manufacturing increased from less than one million to over five and one quarter millions. While the trades have gone through many depressions they seem to increase rapidly both in numbers and influence. The steady growth of trade

unionism in the United States is summed up by Mr. Carroll D. Wright, Commissioner of Labor, in these words. "No matter what the opposition of any particular period was or the character it assumed, no matter what antagonisms within disturbed their order, no matter how defections reduced their ranks at times, and jealousies prevented their immediate success, labor organizations from eighteen hundred and twenty five continued through success and failure, their propaganda extending first to all great cities and ultimately to all parts of the land.

Trade unionism arises from the fact that the individual unorganized workman cannot bargain advantageously with his employer for the sale of his labor. The chief methods of regulations in the unions are, Mutual Insurance, Collective Bargaining, and the Method of Legal Enactment.

The Method of Mutual Insurance though not used as much as the other methods, has proven to be helpful in many cases. Professor Beasley has said, "It is much more economical

to depend upon one society combining all benefits than to contribute to a friendly society for sick and funeral benefits and to a union for tool and accident benefit and trade purposes." A trade society without some benefit fund has been likened to a large standing army "It is a menace to peace."

In the method of collective bargaining a minimum wage is established and other conditions that are necessary and that will apply to all. This does not mean that everywhere the wages are to be the same but that equal work shall receive equal pay. If the trade union did not insist on rules that established equal pay for equal work and certain other conditions, the method of collective bargaining could not exist and the contracts would be made individually. The prime purpose of trade unions would be defeated. There is no objection made to any one being paid more wages for less hours but there is objection made to anyone working below the minimum or for more than a certain number of hours, or for violating any other conditions to which every workman must conform. John Mitchell has said, "If some members of the union were allowed to work with machinery unguarded, whereas others insisted upon its protection; if

some were willing to be over-rushed as to do more than a fair day's wage, or would allow themselves to be forced into patronizing truck stores, to submit to arbitrary fines and unreasonable deductions, whereas others would rebel at these impositions, it would result that in competition among the men to retain their positions, those who were most pliant and lowest spirited would secure the work, and the wages, hours of labor, and condition of employment would be those set or accepted by the poorest, most cringing and least independent of workers. The work that would be done by this class of people would be inferior. When these articles were put on the market they would bring low prices when in competition with articles of better quality so that the employer would not realize as great a profit as when he had a better quality of labor. For this reason it is not only a benefit to the employed to have a system of collective bargaining but it is also a benefit to the employer.

The Method of Legal Enactment is used by all trade organizations to some extent. Some regulations cannot be carried out by any other method since other methods do not establish uniform conditions throughout the country. When a common law is enacted by the legislative body of a country it is not

influenced by the depression of the times. It is easily seen that in order that the trades regulate the method of solving the problems that are thrust upon them, more than one means must be resorted to. The methods that have been mentioned are used in all unions but one of these methods usually becomes predominant caused by the peculiar conditions existing in that particular union.

These different functions have restricted the numbers in the trade unions. By restricting the number, it limits the members of the union to people with better physical health, and with a higher standard of morals, thus putting on the market a higher quality of labor. There is no individual bargaining but a bargain is made by the entire union and by this the conditions of the laborer are protected.

The adoption of a Common Rule tends to the selection of the fittest and provides mental stimulus for a higher level of skill and energy. The uniform conditions of employment stimulate invention and adoption of new processes of manufacture. The Common Rule also tends to drive business into the establishments which are most favorably situated, best equipped, and managed with the greatest ability and to eliminate the old fashioned employer.

Notwithstanding the fact that trade unions have

done much to improve the conditions of labor yet there remains many problems to be solved. Many have long been dreaming of the time when capital and labor should not resort to strike and boycott but would settle their disputes by arbitration. By arbitration they understand the submission of differences to a disinterested third party. One point has been overlooked. Arbitration is never resorted to until each party is equally afraid of the other; and when they have reached that point they can adopt something better than arbitration namely negotiation. This form of industrial peace is used by some of the unions of the United States. This manner of treating important questions eliminates much of the hypocrisy and ill feeling that usually exists between the employer and the union. This form of settling disputes might be called a form of constitutional government. They have their legislative, executive, and judicial branches closely resembling the government of a nation and also their common law and statute law its penalties and sanctions. As an economic organization its object is on the one hand to change the status of labor from one of caprice and uncertainty to one of definiteness and on the other to equalize competitive candidates among employers so far as their labor costs are

concerned. Trade agreements seem to represent the real object of unionism, that is collective bargaining and in this the determination of wages, hours of labor, and the condition of work by men in an establishment or community are agreed upon.

The reduction in the hours of labor is the most demonstrable fruit of the unions but it must be accompanied by a better use of the leisure gained. A continuous performance of the same kind of labor causes one to look at other questions foreign to his particular work, with a very limited vision. In order that one might not be developed in this one sided manner, the leisure hours that are a result of shorter hours of labor might be used to gain general information about other things than his work. Since the laborer as a rule has very little surplus money with which he might buy books and current literature it would be well if libraries could be established by trade unions so that he would not be denied the privilege of acquainting himself with the world by means of reading. The grogshop and other places of vice are always ready to welcome those that come and unless places that inspire a higher standard of morals are to be found, the laborer will become

debauched and degraded.

The child should be taken from the street, out of the mill, and the factory and be placed in school. Children that are mere babies are forced to work and drudge, thus making of the little life a mere machine instead of training it to be a blessing to its country. The trade unions should open their eyes to this terrible calamity and force the heartless employer to realize that such an evil must stop.

The movement of trade unions is marked by one long continuous development. The industrial conditions that are ever changing present an almost unlimited number of problems to be solved. With and only with a permanent and well organized form of labour will these problems be solved in the best manner. "This," said Thomas Carlyle, "This that they call the Organization of Labour is the Universal Vital Problem of the World."