

# The Middle Classes Union

The middle class people have been like the inhabitants of a land which had been chosen as a battle ground by two armies—the armies of Capital and Labor

By J. W. MACMILLAN.

The Middle Classes Union of Great Britain recently celebrated its first anniversary. During the initial year of its existence it has grown amazingly. Launched in March 1919 at a mass meeting in a hotel in London it has attained a growth of 140 branches, scattered over England and Scotland. Some of these branches have over a thousand members. Several have grown so large as to have become unwieldy, and it is proposed to divide them into two. The movement has even crossed the Atlantic, and "The Public Union," incorporated in the State of New York, will carry out the same policy which the British organization has defined.

It is not surprising that an attempt should have been made to organize the middle classes, nor that that attempt should have been first made in Britain, where class organization has been carried so far and has proven so effective. It has long been evident that without organization no class gets what it believes to be its rights. Not through compassion or the sense of justice on the part of those who hold the power are the burdens lifted and privileges granted to any class, but through its own power of compelling attention to its demands. The unorganized class is helpless.

Many reasons lay back of the mass meeting which originated the Middle Classes Union. The rising cost of living, resentment against profiteers, the mounting load of taxation, and the ubiquitous mental unrest are to be discerned in the motives which drew together the men and women who met that night in the London hotel. But there was a chief reason which outweighed all others. It was the need of self-protection in the midst of the warfare between capital and labor. These people felt themselves like to the inhabitants of a land which had been chosen as a battle ground by two armies. Without possibility of sharing in the victory which either side might gain they were sure to find their fields trampled over, their crops ruined, their houses shattered, and perhaps their lives destroyed. They were always the victims, whoever was victor. Moreover, they had seen the strength of labor grow with its increasing organization. They saw the manual worker paid by the state when out of a job. They saw housing legislation proposed by the government which should make it easy for him to find a home. They did not share in these benefits, but rather were forced to pay for them. Many of their number were as poor as many of the unionized workers. No wonder they felt the situation unfair. When a strike was on they were made to bear the chief part of the suffering. The rich are always insured against injury by their superior command of money. The strikers had their strike pay, accumulated for the purpose of sustaining them in these crises. The middle classes had to submit to their coal, gas, milk, or transportation being shut off, on account of no fault they had committed, and in such a way that they were helpless to help themselves. No wonder they thought of organization. They had grown tired of being the 'goat.'

Joined with this feeling of helplessness was a great confidence of possible power. They felt themselves to be the real backbone of the nation. In numbers, intellectual force, combined wealth, voting power and potential economic striking force they were possessed of enormous resources. All that was needed was organization. The chairman of the first meeting said:

"If you are properly organized you will be the greatest force in the nation. You can possibly hold up all the workers. You could hold up the capitalists or you could even hold up the government. You must see that you are not squeezed or crushed and that you are placed in such a position as will necessitate a fair and square deal in all things and the right to live."

The Middle Classes Union was thus created. It has announced its policy as follows:

1. The strongest measures against Bolshevism.
2. The prevention of industrial nationalization.
3. The suppression of profiteers in exploitation and sectional tyranny.
4. More equitable distribution of taxation.
5. Representation of the "middle interests" in all political and economic affairs.

The first two of these articles are apparently aimed at the labor movement. It is in the labor world that advocacy of sovietism and soviet-like schemes is to be found. However, it seems that labor is taking a more conservative attitude as time passes. The report of the committee sent to investigate conditions in Russia has probably given the quietus to syndicalism in labor circles in Britain. There will probably be little need for the Middle Classes Union to fight Bolshevism.

The second article, on the other hand, is in direct opposition to one of the leading demands of organized labor. There the controversy must continue, and no alliance between the labor unions and the Middle Classes Union will be possible while this clause remains in the creed of the latter. At the same time, it is far from the purpose of the Middle Classes Union to take the part of organized capital against labor. It will be no 'strike-breaker.' It will confine itself to maintaining public services during strikes, and to warding off 'lightning strikes.' In other words, it will care for itself, and allow the fighting to proceed. It is impossible, I think, to decide in advance whether such a policy will assist capital or labor in their contests. For, if the running of trains when engineers are on strike will more immediately aid the railway company concerned, it will, in a longer view, defend the strikers against arousing an adverse public opinion.

The new union has already gotten into politics. It has secured representation on a number of parliamentary commissions, including the profiteering committee of the Board of Trade. It has also a taxation committee of its own which submitted evidence to the Royal Commission on Income Tax. So far, it has avoided nominating candidates for parliament. It prefers to support such candidates, of any party, as will agree to its policy. It has prepared a list of questions which is submitted to each aspirant for the Commons, the influence of the union being used for the election of that one which answers satisfactorily. If all candidates answer satisfactorily members may vote according to party lines.

The appearance of the Middle Classes Union seems bound to affect the affiliation of the 'black-coat' organizations. These have been in growing up independently of each other, and without specific alliance with other organizations. They are such as the Association of Engineering and Shipbuilding Draftsmen, the Electrical Power Engineers Association, the Railway Clerks Association, the National Association of Colliery Managers, the Bank Officers' Guild, the National Union of Journalists, the Actors Association and the Associ-

ation of Industrial Chemists. Naturally the labor leaders of the country observed this movement and sought to win it to themselves. They endeavored to bring about a federation of these associations and to unite it with the labor party. A counter movement has been in existence to constitute these associations into a 'third-party' independent of both manual workers and employers. Nothing has yet been done to bring them into alliance with the Middle Classes Union, but such a combination would be as natural, at least, as those already projected. This much, at least, is evident, that the trend of the black-coated workers towards union with the Labor Party has received a check.

It is not easy to forecast the future of the Middle Classes Union. If it does not break up through lack of inherent cohesiveness among its members it may go far. That there is less natural cohesion in the individuals which compose it than in groups of capitalists or of workers is apparent. There is much more variety of economic interest in it than in groups which are held together by either the wage or the profit motive. It might happen that with the passing of the tense condition of the present time it should fall asunder. The citizens committee of Winnipeg was practically an organization of the middle classes born of the pressure of the general strike. It shows no sign of becoming a controlling association for united political and economic action during less stirring days.

If, however, the Middle Classes Union should survive it may play a leading part in the settling down or reconstruction of industry in Britain. If it lives it will grow and become strong. Its resources, as it claims, are immense. It has a large share of the brain and money power of the nation. It is the most direct inheritor of the British economic tradition. Organized and alert in time of strikes or lockouts, it could throw its power on one side or the other with telling effect. Its political self-abnegation is not likely to continue in case of its further growth. There will be middle-class candidates for parliament as well as unionist, liberal, and labor candidates.

## The Aims of "Thrift".

"We must change the terms by which we talk thrift," said Mr. George E. Brock, President of the Home Savings Bank of Boston, when addressing the Vermont State Bankers' Association.

"We have overworked that 'rainy day' argument. For instance, talk to a husky young man about a rainy day. He is young and vigorous, and always expects to be, he is not looking for a rainy day. We will not get far with him with that argument, but connect his savings with his pay envelope, teach him that his savings will create a job, and the more he saves the more steady will be his job, and we may cause him to think. Let our slogan therefore be **"Save Your Money to Create Your Job: and Save More Money to Perpetuate Your Job."**

"A home budget system which starts with the question 'how much of my earnings ought I to save?' and from that point distributes the remainder over the necessities of life, has in it much of the science of wise spending. We bankers who have been brought up to keep other people's cash right to a penny are apt to get careless with our own, but I believe the time will come, in these days when we are expected to give to the government the most intimate details of our personal resources and liabilities, when a systematic budget will be of great assistance to us in making up our returns. It will add to our thrift and will assist us in being conservative in the use of our income."

An employee at the Hamilton plant of Bird & Son asked how watermelons got the water in them, and was told they are planted in the spring.