

Industrial Teamwork in Britain

Labor and capital relations a problem—Industrial parliament proposed solution—Duties and powers

By J. W. MACMILLAN.

One effect of the war in the mother country is in a mutual respect and readiness to co-operate on the part of employers and employees. It will be remembered that when, under the pressure of the German military attack, the trades unions agreed to forego many of the concessions they had won from the managers of industries, they stipulated that these concessions should be restored as soon as the war was ended. The expectation was that the war should leave things as they had been, and that the old strife between capital and labor should be resumed. The war on the continent was to be an interlude in the war in Britain.

But the war with Germany has ended and things cannot be found where they were left when it began. It is a new Britain, and the mind of the British people is not inclined towards recreating the old order. The four years of the war have been educational years. With all the pain and loss they have involved they have yet unfolded such an amazing amount of energy and goodwill, with prodigious results in increase of production and enlarged wages, that no one in his senses would desire to return to the old condition of bickering between masters and workers.

Accordingly, all sorts of proposals are being put forth for the getting together of employers and employees. The government is working on the problem. The associations of employers are drafting constitutions for Industrial Councils, where the two sides may meet together and settle anything liable to lead to trouble. The Labor Party has sent through the world its Programme of Reconstruction. One reads of committees composed of equal numbers of employers and trades union leaders working upon such matters in cities of all parts of England. Twenty Quaker employers have issued a manifesto, which is not likely to be deficient either in good judgment or in the financial authority of its composers.

One of these schemes which seems well worth examination is that born of the antagonism in former years between the federated employers and the organized employees in the building trades. In the summer of 1914 the disagreement had reached a point where a widespread lockout and strike seemed inevitable. The outbreak of the war brought about a truce and reconciliation with the promise of resumption of the dispute at a later time. Now after four years of harmonious activity, based on the common stock of underlying unity and goodwill in the country's service, one of the London employers, Mr. Malcolm Sparkes, has issued a sketch of a plan for the erection of a national industrial parliament for the building industry. Mr. Sparkes explains his motive for trying to find a way to peace and co-operation in such words as these:

"Throughout the whole of the civilized world the story is the same. The parallel rise of trade unions and employers' associations in mutual opposition has reached a point where it is generally recognized that the 'normal condition of the world of industry is one of suppressed war'.

"Under such a system many a forward move on the part of labor towards improved conditions is opposed, almost as a matter of duty, by the employers' associations, and conversely many improvements in the direction of increased production and efficiency are countered by the restrictive regulations of the trades unions; both sides acting, as they believe, in the interests of their members.

"The two sides rarely meet except to make demands of one another or to compromise conflicting claims, and negotiations are inevitably carried on as between two hostile bodies. In this way great powers of leadership are diverted from constructive work into the sterile fields of largely useless controversy."

Mr. Sparkes would have the industrial parliament consist of forty members, one half to be elected by the employers' federations, and one-half by the building trades unions. It should cover the trade for all Great Britain and Ireland. There should be a chairman, who should preside but have no vote. In all voting the numbers casting votes should be equally

from the employers' and employees' representatives. By this means any majority would mean that some of one side or the other had been convinced by the arguments of their old-time adversaries.

The programme of legislation for this industrial parliament should include the settling of all disputes, the regularization of wages, the prevention of unemployment, the employment of disabled soldiers, technical training and research, publicity and the progressive improvement of the trade generally.

The laws framed by the parliament would be divided between two codes, of which one should be compulsory and the other voluntary. It is significant of the spirit of the times in Britain that the voluntary code is taken to be the more important of the two.

The compulsion of the compulsory code would be sought in the House of Commons. There are certain basic matters in regard to which standardization is so desirable that a few recalcitrants should not have the power to render the decision of the majority futile. Such things are the minimum wage, the normal day, overtime conditions, travelling allowances, and terms of notice on discharge. At the present time wages, for instance, vary greatly between the several parts of the British isles. The range sometimes is as great as 100 per cent. Thus, when employees ask for an increase, the employer has immediately to think what effect such a raise will have in regard to the competition of districts not subject to a similar increase. It is evident that if wages were standardized over the whole of the British isles, and subsequent advances made equal throughout the whole area, all such rivalry and friction would be eliminated.

It may well seem that these matters—wages, hours, overtime—are the all-important subjects in an industry. So food is the supreme concern for a man while in the pangs of hunger. Once his hunger is satisfied other concerns assert themselves, and food is seen to be not so much a part of life as a part of the basis of life. Human beings do not live to eat, but eat to live. It is after they have eaten that they begin to live. So it is with these basic minima of industry. Once they are provided for the indus-

try has a chance to grow and become a partner in the higher and worthier life of its members. Having settled the materialistic problems inherent in it, it may make some contribution to problems which are stated in terms of humanity. At the present time it is prevented from rendering the fuller and higher service because it cannot free itself from the stranglehold of the unsolved material problems.

The voluntary code, then, would deal with matters in their native experimental. It would be left to the choice of employers whether or not to give them a trial. The progressives among the employers would be inclined to conduct these social experiments. The results would be published, talked over, and be discussed in the industrial parliament. Some of them would be scrapped. Some of them might be generally adopted. As Mr. Sparkes says:

"The progressive employer is the backbone of the scheme. If he is a mere figment of the imagination, then the scheme is valueless, but if he does exist (and we know he does) then there seems literally no limit to its possibilities. Conceptions of the team spirit in industry and of its organic unity in the public service would gradually cease to be utopian dreams and would assume a definite and concrete shape."

As to the practicability of this scheme, or any such scheme, there can as yet be no answer from actual experience. It is interesting to note, however, that it has commended itself to a large number of the workers in the building trades as desirable and practical. The London committee of carpenters and joiners considered it in 1916 and sent it forward with a strong resolution of approval to their national executive. It reached in time the national council of the Associated Building Trades. This body thought enough of it to have copies printed and circulated among the twelve affiliated unions, and called a special conference to discuss it. At that conference, which represented the national executives of the principal trades unions in the building industry, it was adopted without a dissentient vote.

The next step is to be a conference between the federation of employers and the executives of the trades unions. No news has yet come regarding that conference. But even if the project goes no farther than the point where it stands to-day it is still an assertion of the ultimate identity of interest between employers and workers, a disclosure of the fact that the pose of war may give place to the gesture of peace, and an assurance that even though this plan does not prove to be the solution required, that the campaign of seeking a way out has been begun, with promise of final success.

The Origin of the Submarine

An interesting account of "A Diving-boat" appears in the European Magazine for April, 1812. This is interesting in view of the prominence gained by under water craft in the present war. It will be seen that the principles of the submarine were understood over a century ago.

"Citizen St. Auben, a man of letters at Paris, and member of the tribunate, has given the following account of the bateau plongeur, a diving boat lately discovered by Mr. Fulton, an American.

I have, says he, just been to inspect the plan and section of a nautilus or diving-boat, invented by Mr. Fulton, similar to that in which he lately made his curious and interesting experiments at Havre and Brest.

The diving-boat, in the construction of which he is now employed, will be capacious enough to contain eight men, and provisions enough for twenty days, and of sufficient strength and power to enable him to plunge one hundred feet under water, if necessary. He has contrived a reservoir for air, which will enable eight men to remain under water for eight hours. When the boat is above water, it has two sails, and looks just like a common boat; when she is to dive, the masts and sails are struck.

In making his experiments at Havre, Mr. Fulton not only remained a whole hour under water with three of his companions, but held his boat parallel to the horizon at any given depth. He proved that the compass points as correctly under water as on the surface, and that while under water the boat made way at the rate of half a league an hour, by means contrived for that purpose.

It is not twenty years since all Europe was astonished with the first ascension of men in balloons;

perhaps in a few years they will not be less surprised to see a flotilla of diving-boats, which on a given signal shall, to avoid the pursuit of an enemy plunge under water, and rise again several leagues from where they descended. The invention of balloons has hitherto been no advantage, because no means have been found to direct their course; but if such means could be discovered, what would become of camps, cannon, fortresses, and the whole art of war!

But if we have not yet succeeded in steering the balloon, and even were it impossible to attain that object, the case is different with the diving-boat, which can be conducted under water in the same manner as upon the surface. It has the advantage of sailing like a common boat, and also of diving when it is pursued. With these qualities it is fit for carrying secret orders; to succor a blockaded post, and examine the force and position of an enemy in their own harbors. These are sure and evident benefits which the diving-boat at present promises. But who can see all the consequences of this discovery, or the improvements of which it is susceptible? Mr. Fulton has already added to his boat a machine, by means of which he blew up a large boat in the port of Brest; and if, by future experiments, the same effect could be produced on frigates or ships of the line, what will become of maritime wars, and where will sailors be found to man ships of war; when it is a physical certainty that they may be blown every moment into the air by means of a diving-boat, against which no human foresight can guard them?