

# Getting Together in Toronto

**People Too Ready to be Disturbed by Rumors of Industrial Unrest — Employers and Employees, Entering into Amicable Discussion are Getting Along Well.**

BY J. W. MACMILLAN.

The labor situation, the world over, has been tense during the past year. None the less in Toronto than any where else. Hence now and again, when some prominent personage on either side of the case has uttered a rash and hasty sentence, which may have been the one sentence of that character in an address possibly an hour long and otherwise commonplace to dullness, the newspapers have headlined it and the great public has gasped. Some labor leader utters a conciliatory word about Russia, and visions of the seizure of banks and shooting of all who wear linen collars dance and curvet in people's minds. Or some steady-going employer accuses every class except his own of seeking class interests, and the masses are revolted. But the fact is that there has been very little industrial declamation and less than might have been expected of industrial disturbance since a year ago. True, we are not yet past the first of May, and the Butchers' Union and the Teamsters' Union are as yet unharmonized with their employers. But they are asking for a Board under the Industrial Disputes Act, which is the way to peace.

No news is good news when we are anxious about industrial relations. So long as things move with smoothness and all is well there is nothing to arrest the attention of the onlooker. It is the threat of strikes and the sight of idle men on the street-corners which makes news. Happily, there is little news in the busy establishments of Toronto. In spite of the prevalent mental unrest, the efforts of the extreme radicals, and the skyrocketing of prices, employment is common and production is maintained.

At the same time certain things have happened, which, while they do not qualify for scare paragraphs in the front page are yet of moment. They are not the accidental events, the eddies and ripples of the stream, but the controlling events which guide the current, determine its course and prevent its harmful overflow. There is a discernible movement towards getting together on the part of employers and employees. Much of it is known only to those immediately concerned, and comes out only by chance in conversation, or is revealed on a visit to the plant concerned.

For instance, one of the items which stirred some of the United States newspapers to mirth in the schedule submitted to the Toronto packers by the employees, was a demand for a cup of tea in the midst of the half-daily working periods. It does read like a joke. It suggests a picture of men doing rough and unskilled labor aspiring to the social habits of a ladies' Browning club. But a closer scrutiny put another face on the matter. The work in packing houses is much in refrigerator rooms. A hot drink is welcome and stimulating. It had already become the custom in some of the plants to supply the cup of tea. The custom was already, in part at least, established and had proven its worth. The men asked little more than that it be standardized. In a sense, they were approving an action which had originated with the management.

The most important industrial event in Toronto during the past year, in all probability, is the successful carrying through of the Joint Industrial Council of the Building Trades. This came into being in March, 1919, and has thus more than completed a twelvemonth's probation. Dur-

ing that period it has served the purpose which lay back of its formation. It has provided a medium for friendly discussion between the workers and their bosses. Every incipient dispute has been nipped in the bud. There have been no strikes.

This Council was organized on the model of the Whitley scheme in Britain. Of course, it does not carry out the triple organization which is the vogue in Britain. It may possibly expand into that in time. But it does cover the industrial territory which belongs to the numerous trades involved in the building industry in Toronto. It consists of ten members, with a chairman. Five of these members are chosen by the Building Trades League, the federation of bricklayers, stonemasons, electricians, plumbers and other unions concerned. Five of them are chosen by the Builders' Exchange, the Electrical Contractors, the Sanitary Engineers and the Master Printers' Association. Thus the Council is equally divided between the employing and employed groups.

Like the Whitley Councils, it deals frankly and directly with the trades unions. The workers' representatives are selected by the unions. It also aims at completeness of authority in regard to the affairs it discusses. The chairman is an outsider, but he has no vote. He may conciliate but he cannot arbitrate. If other men, such as experts in any matter under discussion, be joined to the Council or any of its committees they may act only in a consultative way. They cannot vote. The Council has taken the honor and welfare of the building industry into its own keeping and will delegate its powers to no one.

Thus also it has nothing to do with the government. In Britain the attempt was made to merge or unite the Trades Boards and the Industrial Councils. It failed because the two forms of organization were radically different. The Trades Boards are under the government control, and are paid by government money. The Industrial Councils will have no government assistance. They are jealous for their own. One can see in this is a common platform for masters and men, and a practical denial of the current "red" dogma that labor and capital have absolutely nothing in common.

The balance of power between the two sides is sustained with accuracy. They share equally in the payment of expenses. A quorum requires at least three on each side to be present. A majority must be a majority on each side. There are two vice-chairmen, one from each side, and occupying the chair does not debar either of them from voting. The negotiations are thus carried on with each side competent to vote any proposed decision. Yet unanimity is not necessary, for there may be two minorities in the voting upon any question.

Such is the plan which has survived its experimental year. One wonders why it has not been adopted in other industries. The reason is, in part at least, that the building trades had already become federated before the Joint Industrial Council was launched. There is no other federation of trades, to my knowledge, which is similarly prepared for such an advance. And, besides, the organization of employers generally is less complete than would further the facile organization of such councils.

If one asks why the Works Councils have not been set up, in line with old country practice, the reason seems to be that the building trades are outdoor and scattered in their employment. If they worked under common roofs, and the same group met daily in the same place to operate the same machinery, it would be simpler to get the plant organizations into existence.

Next in importance to this Joint Industrial Council are, as I have indicated, the organizations which have come into being in individual plants. They are of various sorts. None of them, so far as I can learn, directly recognize the trade unions. Nevertheless, where the plant is unionized, the control by the union is effective and the plant organization is regarded amicably by union officials. In such establishments as are unorganized the workers are for the first time brought together in a consultative way, and the general result is much the same as if they had been unionized, the one difference being that they are not linked up with workers in similar plants. It is an important difference, I know, but still the only one.

As an instance of plant organization I may take the agreement which has been drawn up between the Bell Telephone Company and its plant employees. These are the linemen, switchmen, installers, repairers and the like, with the central office men. No female employees are included. The agreement provides for an organization of the employees, complete and autonomous in itself. The employees are divided into groups, each of which selects its representative. There are five of these, who become an Employee Representatives Committee. This committee, unlike the labor half of the Joint Industrial Council, has powers and duties of its own. It does not require to meet with an equal number from the managerial side in order to function. It is competent to take up any matter which any employee seems to require adjustment. Thus an aggrieved employee goes first to this committee who become his advisers and champions. They may take such matters up with the officials concerned, and push on from appeal to appeal until they reach the President of the company.

But that is not all. The Employees' Committee is not simply a settler of personal grievances. It is also the representative of the workers in all matters concerned in labor bargaining between them and their employers. Wages, working conditions and hours are to be determined by this committee in session with a similar body representing the management. This joint session is the Departmental Council, and fulfils in a general way the same functions which the Joint Industrial Council fulfils for the building trades. The Bell Telephone scheme has been launched with good promise. A year hence it will have proven its worth or failed.

This is all to the good. It means experimentation, and the industrial world needs new inventions in its human relations even more than it needs them in its factory machinery. Progress must have its path provided in social contacts, in association, emulation, competition and co-operation as much as in the region of creature comforts. The world cannot stand still. To halt means reaction, decay, dissolution. Welcome the social inventor!

It is to the good, also, because it stresses the things which unite the two sides rather than those which divide them. It is sheer and fatuous ignorance to say that there is nothing between employer and employee. It is just as futile and much more dangerous to say that all their interests, in the present industrial order, are in common. But the way out of the disorder and suffering of the present day is not the way of hate and strife. It is the way of discussion and deliberation. It is the path of peace. If there is a road to justice, it is that road.