

"The Whitley Scheme"

By C. V. Corless.

In the creation of democratic organization for unifying the aims of Capital and Labor, Great Britain is once more the pioneer. We instinctively turn to her for industrial experience, as a child turns to a wise parent. Her experience in industry is many centuries older than ours. Her labor is much more highly unionized. Her Trade Unions have passed through two centuries of struggle. Her differences between Labor and Capital are more clearly defined. Her class distinctions, for other (historical) reasons, are more marked—a fact that has added to the bitterness between Capital and Labor. These had brought the industrial dispute in Great Britain to such a stage that, by 1914, many felt that such general strikes were imminent, as would amount almost to, if they did not end in, a revolution. The war suddenly diverted attention from the quarrel. Though some domestic bickering has continued, all parties loyally joined hands in the superhuman effort against the common enemy. The war has, at least for the present, removed from Capital all self-complacency, which was a large factor in the domestic strife. The nation is already face to face with an inconceivable debt which is mounting at an appalling rate. The food supply is threatened. The nation is about to put forth its extreme exertion. There is no room now for old quarrels. Dust and cobwebs have been cleared away. England is never at her best until her back is to the wall. It required three years of war to brush away the last cobweb of self-complacency. She is now not only thoroughly aroused to fighting mood, but has had her creative energy quickened by the crisis.

In the awful throes and agony of the past year of war, Britain brought forth an industrial idea which, if broadly and wisely backed up in future by educational preparation, seems calculated to effect such a revolution in industrial relationships as will remove the malign social results of the pernicious economic policy followed since the industrial revolution of a century ago. In the blackest year of the war, just past, the British Government appointed a Commission whose principal work was to inquire into the causes of industrial unrest and to make suggestions for removing the causes of discontent. The work was quickly and thoroughly done. The whole country was divided into eight industrial areas to each of which was detailed a small Commission of three, consisting of one representative of employers, one of labor, and an impartial chairman. Their reports will prove of great economic value. While these industrial commissions were at work, a short preliminary report was sent to each by a sub-committee of the recently created Reconstruction Department, which at that time had merely the status of a committee appointed to consider the whole problem of industrial relations from the standpoint of post-war reconstruction.

The chairman of this sub-committee was Mr. Whitley, whose name, for brevity, has been attached to the committee, to the report and to the general scheme embodied in the report. The broad recommendation of the Whitley Committee was the establishment in every organized trade of an Industrial Council, repre-

senting both employers and workpeople, and having as its object "the regular consideration of matters affecting the progress and well-being of the trade from the point of view of all engaged in it, so far as is consistent with the general interest of the community." This recommendation, modestly called an "Interim Report on Joint Standing Industrial Councils," was, in June of last year, sent to each of the eight small Industrial Commissions, who quickly secured for it a consideration by more than one hundred Employers' Associations and Trade Unions all over the country. The greatest interest in the proposal was manifested both by the industrial bodies concerned and by the press. There appeared to be at once a general feeling of relief that a possible solution had been found for what had come to be regarded as practically a deadlock. Nothing could indicate better than this feeling of relief the essential soundness at heart of both employers and employed. By October the replies had been received and correlated. The answers of nearly all of the Trade Unions and of most of the Employers' Associations were "overwhelmingly in favor of the adoption" of the general principle of the Whitley Report. Backed thus, the Minister of Labor, on October 20th, informed the Employers' Associations and the Trade Unions of the decision of the Government to adopt the Whitley Report. The document announcing this decision by the Government made it clear:

- (1) that Joint Standing Industrial Councils should be established in all the well-organized industries with as little delay as possible.
- (2) that these Councils would be considered by the Government as "official standing Consultative Committees on all future questions affecting the industries which they represent" and would be the "normal channel through which the opinion and experience of an industry will be sought on all questions with which the industry is concerned," and
- (3) that the Councils are to be "independent bodies electing their own officers and free to determine their own functions and procedure with reference to the peculiar needs of each trade." These autonomous councils will thus "make possible a larger degree of self-government in industry than exists to-day."

These Joint Standing Industrial Councils, of national scope for each well-organized trade, will be supplemented by District Councils and these again by Shop Committees, on both of which masters and men will find equal representation.

The scheme has met with the approval of the Council of the Federation of British Industries, the most representative organization of employers in Great Britain, and of the Trades Union Congress, and to all appearances is in a fair way to success.

Mr. Wilson Harris is responsible for the statement that the idea of Joint Councils of masters and men originated with Mr. Malcolm Sparkes, of London, an employer in the building and allied trades. He had "laid before the men's unions in these trades a memorandum on industrial co-operation. The Painters and