

The Clash of Ideals

By Modernist

The present chaotic state of the Civil Service as a whole, and the Postal Service in particular, has prompted me to write the following, in the hope that it may help us to see a path out of the woods. The reasons for our present conditions are many, but to the majority it will suffice to say that economic conditions overtaking us in the war period and after, were so stunning as to almost nullify all knowledge previously held by us on the Trades Union Movement as applied to the Civil Service.

We were in the analogous position of being Trades Unions without the power to enforce any demand for redress of evils accruing through that extreme disturbance.

Canada is in a particularly queer position as to the makeup of her labor movement. She contains a large number who have immigrated to her shores in the hope of more speedy realization of their hopes. She also contains many and diverse opinions as to the method of attainment of those hopes.

The average Union member does not receive his initiation into World Finance and the keenness of the struggle until he marries and sets up house. He then, in his disappointment at not finding work readily, or the pay adequate, becomes discontented, prejudiced, and finally rebels against all or any authority. In this condition of mind he is unable to reason dispassionately, and is easily swayed by oratory more forcible than rational, and by reforms that on the surface appear to promise immediate advantages. He obtains by contact a semi-digested review of the labor movement from his fellow worker, and through his deep belief and trust upon another's intelligence, is often misled as to the course of remedy. The whole philosophy of the Labor movement, from its inception to the present day, has been patience and a profound belief in the eventual day when the laborer himself shall so direct the education and hygiene of the child life of the nation, that the day of

competitive barter and trade in human service will disappear, and be superseded by a collective system or association of workers on terms of equality, with a voice in the management, under managers elected by themselves.

John Stuart Mill in his political economy prefaces his final statement with, "If mankind continues to improve," and most earnest workers in the movement that has for its inspiration the emancipation of man from the many evils that he is heir to, through economics, admit that all progress is dependent upon that IF. There is, and must be an idealism that battles with every day realism for the final production of that ideal, and it is no small part of the movement, to keep the view ever extended forward upon the ideal. The realists are those who concentrate upon the present and immediate relief of distressing circumstances, believing that the establishment of certain well defined laws of administration, as between owner and worker, would produce industrial peace. Yet they forget that they build for war. They build to fight any refusal of what they consider just demands, taking no deeper thought of the effect of such wars, upon society as a whole.

The idealist view of proceeding according to the evolution of the times, and accepting the present condition of society as incurable, until mankind is educated up to the point where a large portion of our present evils would disappear, (simply by the individual himself preventing a great many of them), is unacceptable to the realist. He is concerned with the present facts only, and irrespective of the myriads of contributory causes, demands immediate change. He assumes that the change in industrial relations will immediately change humanity. Thus we have seen many sporadic movements in the history of the Labor movement, notably the French Syndicalist movement. The I.W.W. in the U.S.A. and the O.B.U. movement in Canada, each

are but realistic attempts to obtain the ideal. These movements have their value, as they oftentimes awaken the large majority from a lethargic state, to a state of extreme activity, and though they fail in the production of complete realization, they leave numbers impressed with the absolute necessity of co-operative action. They also illustrate that industrial action unaccompanied by previous well defined education, is but a straining upon the leash, and not emancipation from it.

We see today the struggle of various ideas of procedure. They mainly are reaching toward the ideal. One school believes in the pooling of all workers, and direction by the Council System.

The other school (the older) believes in the autonomy of crafts, and a council of the leaders of each craft. They all accept the basic ideas. They simply disagree as to the best method of attainment. The whole history of the past is before them to enlighten them as to previous efforts of the workers to attain their cherished hopes, and quotation would be futile.

The Civil Service is a large field and to those enamoured of the force of numbers, is an attractive body to demonstrate those ideas. Yet we have in the service so many shades of thought that practical realization at present seems improbable. But we can from out the turmoil discern a few lessons, and see another step ahead. We note the unattached, unorganized Civil Servant is desirous of procuring representation. We note the unanimous acceptance of the Whitley Council plan of arbitration, and we note that the Civil groups, each embracing all tributary crafts into that group, would be a step further toward eventual realization of the fuller expression. Sympathy is the strongest connecting link, and occupations of a similar nature can more easily understand the struggles of each other. They can unite for mutual good and can so attain the ideal state of employment they aspire to, believing that

"Patronage created the Railway Muddle."