

**INDUSTRIAL PEACE,
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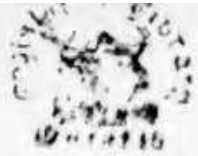
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"The times are too big to warrant
small motives."

—*Theodore Roosevelt.*

INDUSTRIAL PEACE

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INDUSTRIAL PEACE

INDUSTRIAL CONSCRIPTION.

If the term " industrial conscription " means anything at all, it means compelling a person to work or to refrain from working under conditions which are determined, not by the exercise of his or her free choice, but by the operation of some superior authority.

Some months ago a considerable outcry was raised on the score that the Government intended to introduce industrial conscription. The particular form which this compulsion was to take, to whom it would be applied, and to what extent it would be enforced, was never very strictly defined; but shop stewards worked up a good deal of excitement on the subject, especially in Coventry, and men were advised to resist its advent to the uttermost. It is not difficult to understand the instinctive hostility with which such a suggestion was regarded by the workers. Many restrictions on personal liberty had been introduced during the war, and imagination ran riot at the mere mention of the phrase " Industrial Conscription." To some a picture presented itself in which engineers would be marched to their work under military discipline, and forced to follow their trade at military rates of pay. By others the fear was expressed that a conspiracy was on foot which would destroy the whole fabric of Trade Unionism, not only during the war, but in perpetuity. Others, again, professed to believe that it was intended to organise a corps of blackleg strike breakers with the object of intervening in industrial disputes. Needless to say, such fevered forebodings were rather the result of suggestion and of adroit exploitation than the product of any sound process of reasoning, but there was, nevertheless, some tangible excuse for a certain amount of nervousness. The industrial power of Labour depends largely on mobility, and every workman is jealous of his right to pick and choose between jobs and between employers. Economic pressure may make it difficult, even impossible, for a man to indulge his taste for change of employment, but there is all the difference in the world between being unable to alter a situation because it is inevitable, and putting up with it at the dictation of a third party.

The introduction of the Leaving Certificate in 1915 smacked of the latter alternative, and was unpopular on that account,

although in point of fact the restriction on mobility was always waived by Munitions Tribunals on appeal, provided that the aggrieved person could show any reasonable cause for complaint that the consent of the employer had been withheld unreasonably. The "Leaving Certificate" was a war measure, pure and simple, and although the Trade Unions had agreed to its introduction, it could not survive in the face of organised hostility, and so it departed this life on October 15th, 1917, unmourned, except, perhaps, by its own parents.

The next bogey to cause a flutter was known as the "Embargo." This restriction, as our readers will remember,* owed its inception to an attempt on the part of the Government to prevent employers from monopolising more than their fair share of skilled labour. It was conceived in what was believed so to be the common interest, and it is improbable that anybody anticipated the reception which awaited its introduction. Employers have come to be looked upon as fair game for experiment, and they might have protested till they were black in the face and nobody would have taken much notice. As things turned out, however, the boot was found to be on the other leg, and it was Labour which had the grievance, and quite a legitimate one, too. Just as the workman insists upon the right to leave uncongenial employment, so also does he claim to sell his services in the best market, and small blame to him if he hustles a bit in his determination to secure a front seat in the theatre of industry. There is, however, one comment on this attitude which is not inopportune at the present moment. We refer to the marked contrast between the point of view taken by the spokesmen of militant Labour, according to whether the contention at issue is put forward by themselves or by those whom they are determined to consider as "class" enemies. In their opinion, apparently, "hustling" is to be commended if it injures the boss—but to be condemned if it interferes with "solidarity." A rush for the more highly-paid jobs is legitimate when the object is to defeat a Government measure such as the Embargo, but "ca' canny" is the order of the day when limitation of output is detrimental to the employer. In other words, either individualism or solidarity is good sauce for the goose, provided always that it is not sauce for the gander. Brotherly love is inculcated when it injures the other fellow, but it loses much of its virtue when it ceases to form an integral part of the fighting policy of the

* The pros and cons of the abolition of Leaving Certificates were discussed in INDUSTRIAL PEACE for December, 1917, and the question of the Embargo was examined in some detail in September, 1918.

moment. As a generator of hot air, the Embargo controversy was of passing importance, but, for the rest, the matter was quietly dropped, and this component of alleged industrial conscription followed its relative to the limbo which unbaptised infants were once supposed to inhabit.

Like everything else in this imperfect world, Trade Unionism has its shortcomings as well as its merits. Upon the latter there is no need to expatiate, for everybody acknowledges the debt which Labour owes to the principle and practice of combination. When, however, we come to analyse this question of industrial conscription, we shall find it difficult to avoid the conclusion that the essence of effective Trade Unionism resides in its power to coerce the individual in the interest, real or supposed, of the majority of his associated comrades. There are three stages in the development of human society. In the first stage, the crude advantage of supplanting a rival is obvious and elementary. In the second stage, the lesson is learnt that unity is strength, the group prevails against the individual, the stronger group against the weaker, and the combination of groups against the group which stands alone. But as yet the lesson has been learnt only in part, for whilst much is gained by combination, more is lost by dissension. This truth has been revealed in startling fashion, and on an immense scale, by the great war. The unification of the German Empire was a sectional achievement of the first magnitude, but it brought disaster in its train because it sought to dominate the whole world by force. Now at last we know that there is a third stage, and that, in international politics at any rate, the interest of the whole transcends the interest of the part, and that is why, sooner or later, there is going to be a League of Nations to compel even the strongest group to remember the obligations which it owes to its neighbours.

In the fields of British industry, however, we are only in the second stage. The third lesson is still unlearnt. Sectional amalgamation is all the vogue, and strong combinations, such as the Triple Alliance of Miners, Railwaymen and Transport Workers, are tempted to flatter themselves that they can coerce the individual until the machine is invincible, and, when this is accomplished, that they can proceed to dominate the country and impose their will upon a prostrate nation. May the example of Germany serve as a warning against any such false deductions. Initial advantages they may secure, but, in the long run, history will repeat itself, and a majority, called into being, like the Grand Alliance, by the stress of a common and imminent danger, will arise and overthrow

those who would usurp sovereign power in the interest of a minority—formidable though it may be.

But while Trade Union leaders are still enlisting voluntary forces to fight the Government and the employer in what they believe to be the interest of "the workers," the rank and file are themselves planning to pit their strength against their leaders, to overthrow them and to "enable the men . . . nay, *compel* them, to take the supreme control of their own organisation." The Unofficial Reform Committee of the South Wales Miners' Federation has detailed a scheme of reorganisation on lines which will "enable the new spirit of democratic control to manifest itself." Dissatisfied with the conciliation work of the last nineteen years, the Unofficial Committee have decided that there is a necessary and inevitable antagonism of interest between leaders and the rank and file. You can't cure the leaders; they are the inheritors of original sin. The only remedy is to abolish them and let each man be the sole arbiter of his industrial destiny. Industrial anarchy, you say? Well, it certainly looks like it, but the originators of the scheme have labelled it "democratic control," and after an impartial examination of the outlines of the proposal, we have come to the conclusion that "Industrial Conscription" is the term which most accurately describes its policy and constitution.

The Committee's ultimate objective is to form an "organisation to cover the whole of the coal, ore, slate, stone, clay, salt, mining or quarrying industry of Great Britain, with one Central Executive." "The working class, if it is to fight effectively, must be an army, not a mob. It must be *classified, regimented and brigaded*, along the lines indicated by the product. Before an organised and self-disciplined working class can achieve its emancipation, it must coalesce on these lines." And the Committee lay it down that it must be a cardinal principle of the organisation "that every man working in or about the mine, no matter what his craft or occupation, be required to both *join and observe its decisions*." The funds and administration of the organisation are to be centralised, but "all power of legislation shall remain in the hands of the members, through the Lodge and the ballot vote. Unfortunately—or fortunately, in the interests of industry—the Committee have thought fit to illustrate the working of the constitution by the following example, which discloses the "worm i' the bud":

"To illustrate the working by a given case, we will take a dispute at a certain colliery. A seam has been opened out,