



The Process of Amalgamation in British Trade Unionism¹.

by SIDNEY WEBB.

IT has long been a matter of reproach to British Trade Unionism that its gigantic forces have been scattered among too great a number of separate Trade Unions. So confused and unsystematic has been its spontaneous upgrowth that it is not even possible to state with precision exactly how many distinct societies exist. So great is the variety of constitutions, and so intricate is the complication of relationships, that no definite line can be drawn between separate and autonomous Trade Unions, joined together by merely federal bonds, and the local branches of a national society enjoying a large measure of local autonomy. In 1894, when the *History of Trade Unionism* was first published, the authors estimated that the number of separate societies, which might be reckoned as anything between 930 and 1,750 according to the view taken of the status of the constituents of federal Unions and federations, was best estimated at about 1,100, having an aggregate membership of 1,500,000. At the present time (1921), when the aggregate membership has risen to nearly 8,000,000, a similar estimate would place the number of separate societies at much the same figure as in 1894, namely 1,100. Whilst the average membership of all the societies has increased in the 27 years by 433 per cent., the total number of distinct societies has remained approximately unchanged. The number of societies dissolved, or merged by amalgamation in other societies, is about equalled by the number of new societies formed.

Such a statement, however, would give a very misleading idea of the structural change which has come over the British Trade Union world. In the freedom of organisation and the local spontaneity of action which characterises British Trade Unionism, the continual springing-up of new Unions has

(1) For the facts and statistics students may be referred to the 1920 edition of the *History of Trade Unionism*, by S. and B. Webb; *The Labour Year Book* for 1916 and 1919; *An Introduction to Trade Unionism*, by G. D. H. Cole, 1917; *The Irish Labour Movement*, by W. P. Ryan, 1919; *Trade Unionism on the Railways*, by G. D. H. Cole and R. Page Arnot, 1917; the *Monthly Circular* of the Labour Research Department, and the monthly *British Trade Union Review* issued by the Parliamentary Committee of the Trades Union Congress. The publication of the official statistics of Trade Unionism by the Ministry of Labour was interrupted by the war, and has not yet been fully resumed.

the very smallest significance. For the most part they represent the beginnings of organisation in localities, or in sections of employment, or among groups of workers, to which the Trade Unionism of the larger societies has not yet penetrated. Only rarely do they represent a genuine secession from the ranks of any other society, determined usually by personal rivalries or by transient resentment at some decision of the central executive. Occasionally, on the other hand, they are to be accounted for by the emergence of some new plan of organisation, or some novel basis of union. For the most part these small upgrowths of Trade Unionism rise and fall like mushrooms. At any moment there may be, in the nooks and crannies of the manifold industries and services of the United Kingdom, many dozens of such newly-born societies struggling to survive, but never numbering, in the aggregate, more than a few tens of thousands of members and exercising no influence whatever in the Trade Union world. The following list of typical new societies at the present time (1921) serves incidentally to indicate the contemporary tendency towards Trade Unionism of clerks, scientific workers and others who have not before shown much desire for combination.

RECENTLY CONSTITUTED BRITISH TRADE UNIONS.

National Society of Tailors' Cutters.
 Police and Prison Officers' Association.
 Scottish National Union of Ticket Writers.
 Scottish Textile Workers' Union (a break-away from the
 Workers' Union).
 National Association of Church Mission Keepers.
 Trade Union Clerks' Guild.
 National Federation of Women Teachers.
 Amalgamated Managers' and Foremen's Union.
 Association of Engineering and Shipbuilding Draughtsmen.
 National Union of Dock, Wharves and Shipping Staffs.
 Bank Officers' Guild.
 Shipping Clerical Staffs Guild.
 Essex and Eastern Counties Fishermen.
 National Union of Scientific Workers.
 Shipbuilding, Engineering and Steel Commercial Staffs
 Association.
 Union of Lady Musicians.
 National Union of Commercial Teachers.
 Institute of Commercial and Specialised Teachers.
 Incorporated Society of Commercial Teachers.
 Association of Masters in H.M. Dockyard Schools.
 Association of Teachers in Technical Institutions.
 Society of Pitman's Certificated Teachers of Shorthand.
 Association of University Teachers.
 West Ham Corporation Employees' Federal Council.

Survey Staff Clerks' Association (Board of Trade).
Government Laboratory Analysts' Staff Association.
National Union of Commercial and Industrial Employees
Architects and Surveyors' Assistants' Union.
Association of Builders' Foremen and Clerks.

A more permanent element is afforded by several hundred more or less stable local societies, which are often of old standing, and sometimes composed of skilled handicraftsmen in the old-fashioned industries, where the tradition of a purely local organisation has not yet been superseded by a national union. These several hundred small societies, in many different trades, of which the following list affords interesting specimens, also account for no more than a few tens of thousands of members, and, whilst not actually sources of weakness, give to the Trade Union world more of picturesque diversity than of industrial strength.

But none of these small societies, whether of mushroom growth or retaining an old-world localism, affect at all seriously the strength of Trade Unionism in the great national industries. British Trade Unionism used to be compared to its disadvantage with the more scientifically organised German Trade Unionism, where, as it was often said, an aggregate membership of three or four millions was concentrated in no more than 48 strong and united societies. The comparison was at no time correct. It ignored, on the German side, the existence of a considerable number of Trade Unions not connected with the Social Democratic Party, namely the Hirsch-Duncker and the so-called Christian Unions, which have often proved more serious sources of weakness to the Trade Union movement than the continued existence in the United Kingdom of a number of independent local bodies, none of them of any great strength, and few of them having any plan or policy of their own. The comparison ignored, too, on the British side, the fact that probably five-sixths of the entire membership of the Trade Unions of the United Kingdom, and practically all the effective force of Trade Unionism, was and is concentrated in the hundred principal societies to which the Ministry of Labour has long confined its detailed statistical reports. At the present time it is probable that the 48 largest Trade Unions of the United Kingdom concentrate in themselves a larger aggregate membership, and very much greater accumulated funds, than have ever been at the command of the same number of societies in any other country.

During the past decade the British Trade Union Movement has been stirred by a powerful impulse to amalgamation among the several societies. But it has not been in the elimination or absorption of the spontaneously arising or traditionally lingering local societies that the process of amalgamation or fusion of Trade Unions in the United

SOME SMALL LOCAL UNIONS.

Trade Union	Year Estd.	Membership in 1910
Gold Beaters' Trade Society	1777	46
Liverpool Operative House Painters' Old Society . .	1798	983
Original Society of Paper Makers	1800	567
Sheffield Saw Grinders' Trade Protection Society . .	1800	72
City of Glasgow Operative Boot and Shoe Makers' Society	1815	145
London Union of Journeymen Basket Makers	1816	120
Edinburgh Operative Cordwainers	1822	163
Twisters and Drawers of Glasgow and Vicinity . .	1833	104
North of England Brass, Aluminium, Bronze and Kindred Alloys Moulders' Trade and Friendly Society	1834	700
Liverpool Carvers' and Gilders' and Frame Workers' and Fitters' Society	1837	29
Gateshead and Newcastle District Quarrymen . . .	1840	305
Amicable and Brotherly Society of Machine Printers	1841	983
South Shields Steam-Tug Boatmen	1842	205
London Mill Sawyers and Woodworking Machinists	1842	117
Painting Brush Makers' Provident Society (London)	1842	206
Liverpool Coopers	1843	500
United Flint Glass Cutters' Mutual Assistance and Protection Society	1844	671
Machine, Engine, and Iron Grinders' Society . . .	1844	703
Manchester, Salford and District Brewers' and General Coopers	1845	120
Birmingham Operative Brass Cock Finishers	1845	57
Belfast Operative Plasterers' Association	1845	80
Wear Steam Packet Trade and Friendly Society . .	1847	90
Razor Blade Forgers' Protection Society (Sheffield)	1848	54
Glasgow and District Glass Bottle Makers' Society .	1848	230
Basford and District Bleachers' Association	1848	120
Flint Glass Makers' Friendly Society	1848	916
National Independent Enginemen (Sheffield) . . .	1851	40
Tobacco Strippers (London)	1851	60
Birmingham Division, Skinners' Society	1853	252
Leeds Division, Skinners' Society	1853	360
London Division, Skinners' Society	1853	60
Blackburn and East Lancashire Roller Coverers' Society	1853	21
Glasgow Gilders' Society	1854	25
Southport, Birkdale and Vicinity Operative House Painters' Association	1862	213
United Biscuit Bakers, Pastrycooks and Confectioners (London, W.)	1862	100
St. Helens Association of Colliery Enginemen	1864	162
Blackburn Associated Reedmakers	1865	24
Associated Free Engine Keepers of Fife and Kinross Labour Protection Sick and Funeral Society	1865	368
River Thames Barge Builders	1872	341
Society of Iron Safe Engineers	1874	99
Shropshire Enginemens, Miner's and Surfacemen's Federation	1875	32
Wire Card Setting Machine Tenders	1875	219
Farnworth Enginemen and Boilermen	Prior to 1878	61

LIST OF TRADE UNIONS WITH UPWARDS
OF 25,000 MEMBERS IN 1920.

	Approximate Membership.
Miners' Federation of Great Britain	900,000
Workers' Union	495,000
National Union of Railwaymen	481,000
National Union of General Workers	470,000
Amalgamated Engineering Union	420,000
Weavers, Northern Counties Association	218,620
National Union of Distributive and Allied Employees	185,000
National Amalgamated Union of Labour	170,000
Amalgamated Society of Wood Workers	165,000
Amalgamated Union of Shipbuilding, Engineering and Constructional Workers	160,000
Iron and Steel Trades Confederation	134,000
Agricultural Labourers' and Rural Workers' Union	130,000
Dock, Wharf, Riverside and General Workers' Union	119,819
Garment Workers' Trade Union	101,493
National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives	101,000
United Vehicle Workers	100,000
Union of Post Office Workers	93,000
General Union of Textile Workers	90,996
Railway Clerks' Association	90,000
Card and Blowing Room Operatives, Amalgamated	76,000
National Sailors' and Firemen's Union	75,000
National Union of Printing and Paper Workers	70,000
House and Ship Painters and Decorators	67,000
Enginemn, Firemen, Mechanics, Motormen and Elec- trical Workers, National Amalgamated Unions	62,498
Locomotive Engineers and Firemen's Association	60,000
Municipal Employees' Association	60,000
Electrical Trades Union	55,000
National Union of Dock Labourers	53,000
Bleachers, Dyers and Kindred Trades, National Federa- tion	51,903
National Union of Foundry Workers	50,000
Gas, Municipal and General Workers, Amalgamated Society	46,173
Operative Bricklayers' Society	45,000
Amalgamated Society of Tailors	40,000
N. A. S. of Male and Female Pottery Workers	40,000
National Union of Clerks	36,000
National Association of Builders' Labourers	35,000
Brassworkers and Metal Mechanics, National Society	32,000
National Union of Vehicle Workers	30,000
United Builders' Labourers' Union	30,000
Furnishing Trades' Association	30,000
Typographical Association, Provincial	29,567
National Society of Brassworkers and Metal Mechanics	29,000
Amalgamated Association of Operative Cotton Spinners	25,000
United Order of General Labourers of Great Britain and Ireland	25,000
National Union of Blastfurnacemen, Ore Miners, Coke- workers and Kindred Trades	25,000
National Union of Vehicle Builders	25,000

Kingdom has been most conspicuous. Nor has the process come about by the diminution of religious or racial rivalry. England has practically never suffered from the religious or racial cleavages which have, in various other countries, produced intractable rivalries in Trade Union organisation. The separate organisation of Roman Catholic workers—so characteristic of Germany and Holland, Belgium and Italy—and the separate organisation of workmen of particular races, so common in the United States as well as on the Continent of Europe, has played practically no part in English Trade Union history. There have, it is true, from time to time, existed in the Lancashire cotton-weaving industry half a dozen small local bodies, organised principally in resentment at some decision or action of the principal Unions that offended the feelings of a small minority; and this minority was largely, though not exclusively, Roman Catholic. At present (1921) there appear to be four such societies, namely, the Blackburn Weavers' Protection Society, the Clitheroe Weavers', Winders' and Warpings' Protection Society, the Nelson and District Weavers' Protection Society, and the Wigan and District Weavers', Winders', Beamers' and Rulers' Protection Society. A "Federation of Protection Societies," which existed for some time, continues no longer. This insignificant instance, of no practical importance, represents all that we have known in the United Kingdom of sectarian cleavages in Trade Union organisation. From time to time, indeed, there have also arisen separate professedly Jewish Trade Unions, chiefly in the ready-made clothing, baking, butchering and cabinet-making industries. These small and transient organisations have not really represented either a religious or a racial cleavage, but merely the spontaneous association of workers in particular sections of the industry, to which the national organisation had not effectively spread, and which happened to be carried on by Jewish workmen. (1) At present, it is believed that all such societies, with the exception of the Catholic Teachers' Federation, the London Jewish Butcher Workers, the London Jewish Bakers' Union and the Manchester Jewish Bakers, have merged themselves in the national Trade Unions.

The process of amalgamation or fusion which has increasingly characterised British Trade Unionism during the past decade has been, in the main, of another kind. It has been, in the first place, a fusion of rival Unions in the same handicraft. Thus the Shipwrights, once dispersed among a number of separate Unions at the various seaports,

(1) Among such societies may be mentioned the East London Jewish Tin Plate Workers (established 1904), Leeds Jewish Slipper Makers, Riveters and Finishers (1894), Leeds Jewish Tailors, Machinists and Pressers (1893), Manchester Jewish Tailors, Machinists and Pressers (1896), Birmingham Jewish Tailors, Machinists and Pressers (1898), East London Jewish Tailors, Machinists and Pressers (1899), Liverpool Jewish Tailors, Machinists and Pressers (1901), Jewish Tailoresses (London East) (1903), London Jewish Compositors and Printers (1904).

began to join together in 1882, when the Associated Shipwrights of Scotland, principally on the Clyde, and the Tyne Shipwrights' Provident Society united to form the Associated Shipwrights' Society, which started with eleven branches but with no more than 1750 members. But the Barrow Society joined in 1883; that of Portsmouth in 1884; those of North Shields, Middlesborough and Southampton in 1887; and those of Blyth and Stockton in 1888. In 1889 the Hartlepool Society was absorbed; in 1891 the separate societies at Hull, Grimsby, Runcorn and on the Mersey were taken over; those of Bristol and Swansea in 1892; whilst those of Cardiff and Belfast (including Larne and Carrickfergus) joined in 1893. The South Shields Society came in during 1894, and the River Thames Protective Society in 1899. The last local shipwrights' societies to succumb to the amalgamation were the three very old ones of the Wear (in 1908), the London Provident Shipwrights (in 1913), and the Liverpool Shipwrights (in 1909). Meanwhile, the allied craft of the drillers was absorbed in the first decade of the present century; the National Drillers' Association (itself an amalgamation of local societies) being taken over in 1900, the London Drillers' Society in 1909 and the Wear, Tees and Hartlepool Drillers' Association in 1910. So, too, the riggers and sailmakers have been absorbed, the North Shields Local Riggers' Society being taken over in 1912, and the Sailmakers' Federation of Great Britain, which had in the course of the preceding half-century united the little societies of sailmakers at the other ports, merging itself in September 1920. The shipwrights, riggers and sailmakers, long addicted to a rigid localism, have not only drawn together in a single national society, but now that most ships are built of steel plates, have also united with the strong Trade Union of Boilermakers, by whom these steel plates were at first exclusively handled, and with the Associated Blacksmiths, in such a way as to form one powerful combination, entitled the Amalgamated Union of Shipbuilding, Engineering and Constructional Workers, in which nearly every workman engaged in building the hull of a ship, whether of wood or of steel, or fitting it with masts and rigging, from one end of the Kingdom to the other, is now firmly enrolled.

A number of local and sectional societies of makers of clothing—among them the Clothiers' Operatives' Trade Union, the London and Provincial Clothiers' Cutters, the London Society of Tailors and Tailoresses, the Jewish Tailors and Tailoresses and the Waterproof Garment Workers—combined in 1915 to form the United Garment Workers' Trade Union; and in 1920 came to an agreement with the old-established Amalgamated Society of Tailors and Tailoresses, and the separate Scottish Society of Tailors and Tailoresses, to combine in a single amalgamated Union covering all the workers on clothes. The merger of the Amalgamated Society of Tailors

and Tailoresses was not completed, owing to its withdrawal before balloting; the Waterproof Garment Workers also presently withdrew and re-formed their separate Society. To turn to an entirely different industry, the workers in the gold and silver trades in Sheffield, Birmingham and London have, for half a century, been organised in tiny sectional societies, each confined to a small part of the trade. A number of these small Unions united in 1911 to form the Gold and Silver and Kindred Trades Society. These Unions were : the Sheffield Silversmiths' Trade Protection Society, the Sheffield Hollow-ware Stampers' Trade Protective and Provident Society, the Sheffield Silver and Electro-plate Finishers' Protection and Provident Society, the Sheffield Britannia Metal Smiths, the London Silver Plate Workers' Society, the London Silver Plate Polishers' Society, the Spoon and Fork Filers', Odd Workers' and Stampers' Society (Sheffield), the Sheffield Hollow-ware Biffers' Provident Society, the Birmingham Britannia Metal Workers' Association, the London Society of Silver Workers and the Sheffield Silver Platers and Gilders. All the various little societies of sheet metal workers (except that of Birmingham) have united to form the National Union of Sheet Metal Workers and Braziers. The National Amalgamated Furnishing Trades' Association, which was formed in 1902 by the combination of the Alliance Cabinet Makers and Furnishing Trades Association and the United Operative Cabinet and Chairmakers of Scotland, has gradually absorbed rival societies. In 1911 it was joined by the Amalgamated Society of French Polishers, in 1912 by the Edinburgh and Liverpool Polishers' Society, in 1914 by the Women Upholsterers, Caners and Plate Glass Workers, and in 1918 by the Independent Society of Cabinet-makers. Negotiations were entered into with the principal Union in the wood-working industry, the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters, Cabinetmakers and Joiners; but in March, 1920, this Union preferred to link up with the older but much smaller General Union of Carpenters and Joiners to form the Amalgamated Society of Woodworkers, a society of 165,000 members, which may yet renew negotiations for amalgamation with the Furnishing Trades Association. A more conspicuous example is that of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers—itsself the product of the great merging of 1850—which a year ago united with six other societies of various kinds of engineering craftsmen, namely, the Steam Engine Makers' Society, the United Machine Workers' Association, the United Kingdom Society of Amalgamated Smiths and Strikers, the Associated Brassfounders' and Coppersmiths' Society, the North of England Brass Turners' Society and the London United Metal Turners, Fitters and Finishers, to form the Amalgamated Engineering Union with 400,000 members. Nine other engineering societies, having among them 100,000 members, also agreed to come in, but failed to comply with the

requirements of the law. Of these, the Amalgamated Toolmakers, Engineers and Machinists and the London United Brass Founders' and Finishers' Society have since joined the new amalgamation, together with three other societies, the Amalgamated Instrument Makers' Society, the North of England Brass Turners, Fitters and Finishers and the Dublin United Brass Founders, Finishers and Gasfitters. The others, namely, the Electrical Trades Union, the United Pattern Makers' Association, the Associated Smiths and Strikers, the National Brass Workers and Metal Mechanics, the Association of Engineering and Shipbuilding Draughtsmen and the Scale and Beam Makers' Society may yet come in. Negotiations for union are also in progress with the United Operative Plumbers and Domestic Engineers, an old-established society, having connections also with the building trades on the one hand and with the shipbuilding industry on the other.

In 1920 the various local societies of blast furnace workers, which were associated in the Blastfurnacemen's Federation, agreed to amalgamate, as from July 1921, into a single society, which will probably be called the National Union of Blast furnacemen, Ore Miners, Coke Workers and Kindred Trades.

In October, 1919, the Postmen's Federation, the Postal and Telegraph Clerks' Association and the Fawcett Association combined to form the Union of Post Office Workers, which was joined, two months later, by six smaller societies of Post Office employees, namely, the Bagmen's Association, the Central London Postmen's Association, the London Postal Porters' Association, the Tracers' Association, the Tube Staff Association and the Messengers' Association. Its present membership seems to be about 93,000.

In August, 1919, the National Union of Vehicle Builders was formed by the amalgamation of the London Coachsmiths' Vicemen's Trade Society, the United Kingdom Society of Coachmakers, the London and Provincial Union of Coachmakers and the London Operative Coachmakers' Federal Union.

The Building Trades have not been passed over by this movement towards amalgamation. In March, 1920, five Scottish Trade Unions, viz., the United Operative Masons' Association of Scotland, the Operative Masons and Granite Workers' Association, the Tilelayers, the Marble Workers and Fireplace Builders and the Scottish Paviers, amalgamated as the Scottish Builders' and Monumental Workers' Association; whilst four English Societies—the Operative Bricklayers' Society, the Manchester Unity of Bricklayers, the Operative Stonemasons' Society, and the Masons' and Paviers' Union—are now balloting on amalgamation, which will probably result in the merging of some or all of these important societies.

The various Societies of pottery workers have united in the National Amalgamated Society of Male and Female

Pottery Workers, which has absorbed the United Ovenmen's, Dippers' and Kilnmen's Society and the United Packers' Association.

A special feature of the past decade has been the great increase in membership and rise to importance of the societies of unskilled or semi-skilled, or only slightly specialised wage-earners, male or female, who now prefer to be styled General Workers. About a score of separate societies of this kind are in existence, the principal being those specified in the following list :—

Workers' Union.

Irish Transport and General Workers' Union.

National Union of Distributive and Allied Employees.

Gas Workers' Association.

United Order of General Labourers of Great Britain and Ireland.

National Union of General Workers.

Constitutional Labour Union of Great Britain.

National Amalgamated Labourers' Union of Great Britain and Ireland.

Irish Women Workers' Union.

Dock, Wharf, Riverside and General Labourers' Union.

Of these, the most extensive and the most important are the Workers' Union, with 495,000 members, now in process of uniting with the National Amalgamated Union of Labour (170,000 members) and the Municipal Employees' Association, and rapidly growing in numbers. The combined Society, which will be styled the National Amalgamated Workers' Union, may very likely find itself, within a year or two, approaching a membership of a million, and is already, with nearly 3,000 local branches, the largest completely unified wage-earners' organisation in the United Kingdom.

Scarcely inferior in magnitude is the National Union of General Workers, formerly "the Gasworkers" (established 1889) with 470,000 members, which has, within the last few years, absorbed various smaller societies, of which the principal were the Amalgamated Union of Machine and General Labourers (1916) and the British Labour Amalgamation (1917). It is now in process of absorbing the National Federation of Women Workers — the only important exclusively women's Trade Union — whose membership has fallen to about 30,000, and the Municipal Employees' Association, with a membership of 60,000. There is a project under discussion for a yet wider amalgamation, to include all the ten existing societies of dock, waterside, canal, road conveyance and other transport workers, together with the three societies of shipping clerks, each section maintaining a certain measure of "craft" autonomy, whilst securing administrative unity on matters of general policy.

The path to this amalgamation has been made easy, first by the union of nearly all the societies in the Transport Workers' Federation, and secondly by the amalgamation of the Amalgamated Association of Tramway and Vehicle Workers with the London and Provincial Union of Licensed Vehicle Workers and with several smaller societies into the United Vehicle Workers' Union, with a membership of 100,000.

Another widely disseminated Union in this class, the Agricultural Labourers' and Rural Workers' Union, with 130,000 members, is actively discussing amalgamation with the energetic Scottish Farm Servants' Union and the National Union of Horticultural Workers. Half of all the organised agricultural labourers are enrolled in the Workers' Union, or the National Union of General Workers, or some other society admitting all sorts of "General Workers".

Another section of wage-earners, in various ways connected with the "General Workers", is that of the large class of "assistants" in the wholesale and retail distributive trade—"countermen" and salesmen in retail shops and Co-operative societies, warehousemen and packers, and the extensive and varied class employed in manufacturing, preparing, bottling and labelling different products (largely foodstuffs and commodities for household use). The three principal societies enrolling workers of this extensive section were the National Amalgamated Union of Shop Assistants, Warehousemen and Clerks (established in 1891, and now counting a membership of about 89,000); the Amalgamated Union of Co-operative Employees and Commercial and Allied Workers (also established in 1891, and attaining latterly about as many members); and the National Union of Warehousemen, with nearly an equal number. The two latter societies have now joined to form the National Union of Distributive and Allied Employees, which is said to have more than 185,000 members; and negotiations for amalgamation with the National Amalgamated Union of Shop Assistants, Warehousemen and Clerks are still in progress.

Finally, it may be added that an amalgamation has been agreed to between the principal society of seamen, the National Sailors' and Firemen's Union (membership about 75,000), and two smaller societies, the British Seafarers' Union and the Hull Seamen's Union. This will be submitted for ratification to a vote of all the members of the three societies, who are, in the course of their vocation, scattered all over the world, and beyond reach of postal communications. Arrangements are therefore made for the ballot papers to be personally issued to and reclaimed from each member whenever he reaches a port in the United Kingdom, in the course of the next six months. Whether by this means a 50 per cent. poll of the whole aggregate membership can be obtained seems doubtful.

It looks, indeed, as if, within a year or two, the three

million Trade Unionists among the general labourers, the seamen and firemen, the dock, wharf, and riverside workers, the agricultural labourers, the workers employed in wholesale and retail shops and warehouses and Co-operative societies, and other unspecialised or only slightly specialised workers, male or female, will be united in five or six gigantic societies, each having not less than several hundred thousand members, organised in one, two, or three thousand separate branches throughout the Kingdom. The Irish Transport and General Workers' Union, which has recently absorbed various small local societies, and now dominates Irish Trade Unionism, will probably remain separately organised.

It should be added that practically all the societies enrolling workers of this large and vaguely defined class are closely linked together in two powerful federations—those engaged in different branches of transport in the Transport Workers' Federation, and others again in the National Federation of General Workers.

More striking has been the process by which the great majority of the workers employed in two great industries—the railway service and coalmining—have been gathered in two gigantic organisations, the National Union of Railwaymen with 450,000 members, and the Miners' Federation of Great Britain, with no fewer than 900,000. In both cases this has come about only to a small extent through the fusion or absorption of rival Trade Unions. It has been much more the outcome of a great and continuous increase in Trade Union membership, brought about by the activity and energetic policy of the dominant organisation, of which the absorption of other societies was only a symptom.

The National Union of Railwaymen was formed in 1913 by the merging of the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants (established in 1872) with two smaller societies, with a constitution framed for the purpose of securing "the complete organisation of all workers employed on or in connection with any railway in the United Kingdom" This was acclaimed as a "New Model" for Trade Union organisation, whereby not only "Localism", but also "organisation by craft" were abandoned, in favour, as it was said, of "organisation by industry" (Industrial Unionism). But two powerful Trade Unions of railway employees stood, and continue to stand, aloof, namely, the Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen (about 60,000 members), and the Railway Clerks' Association (about 90,000 members). What is even more important, the claim to represent all the persons employed on or in connection with the railways brought the new society, at least potentially, into rivalry with (a) the "craft" Unions of engineers, carpenters, boilermakers, etc., who claimed to represent the mechanics employed in the railway workshops; (b) the Labourers' or General Workers' Unions, who continued to

enrol labourers in railway employment; (c) the Unions claiming the allegiance of the sailors, firemen, cooks and stewards on the railway companies' steamships; (d) the Unions enrolling the waiters and kitchen staff at the railway companies' fifty-five hotels; and (e) even the printing Trades Unions in respect of the compositors and book-binders employed in the railway printing shops. The National Union of Railwaymen has trebled its membership in the past seven years, but can hardly be said to have solved the problem of the proper unit of Trade Union organisation.

The Miners' Federation of Great Britain, starting as a federal body in 1888 with no more than 36,000 members, has now united the principal miners' organisations in every coalfield in Great Britain; and to-day includes — either by merger, by local affiliation, or by national affiliation—a considerable proportion of all the local and sectional Trade Union organisations in the industry, with a total of 900,000 members out of 1,200,000 engaged in or about the mines. But, as with the railway workers, this great increase has come about largely through the mere growth in Trade Union membership, and only partially by the fusion or absorption of other Unions. Indeed, although the Miners' Federation seeks to embrace the entire range of workers in or about the mines, there are, not affiliated to the Miners' Federation either locally or nationally, at least 43 separate societies of enginemen, boilermen and firemen; colliery mechanics; undermanagers, deputies, overmen, and other officials; colliery clerks; and surface workers of various kinds. Seventeen of these societies formed, in February, 1917, a National Council of Colliery Workers other than miners for the purpose of maintaining their separate influence.

Nevertheless the Monmouthshire and South Wales Colliery Enginemen's, Stokers' and Surface Workers' Association has just amalgamated with the South Wales Miners' Federation; and similar accessions occur nearly every month.

At the same time, it must be recognised that, in spite of the imperfect success yet achieved along the line of amalgamation or fusion, the dominant motive and purpose of the great aggregations of the past decade has been to strengthen the power of the combined workers, not merely to increase wages and to shorten the hours of labour, but to acquire an increasing share in the positive management of the industry by which they live. In their struggles for ever wider amalgamations, and notably in the desire to substitute "organisation by industry" for "organisation by craft", they have tended to throw into the background the claim of each specific vocation for "vocational self-determination". As seen in the cases of the enginemen and carpenters, the clerks and unspecialised labourers, no less than in those of the draughtsman and designer, the architect and the civil or mechanical engineer, the accountant and the chemist, the

members of each distinct vocation are found employed in many different industries. The organisation by which they can govern their own vocation can scarcely be identical with the organisation by which they will share in the management of the several industries in which they are engaged. At present, the Trade Union world is divided among societies which aim, more or less confusedly, at including the whole of the workers in a given kind of employment or industry, to whatsoever craft or vocation they belong, and other societies which aim at including all those belonging to a given craft or vocation irrespective of the industry or employment in which they are working. The result is rivalry and confusion. Towards the solution of the problem (1)—now the central problem of British Trade Unionism—it can hardly be suggested that the extensive fusions and amalgamations have yet achieved much. It may be that what is required is a double organisation, on the one side securing to all the various kinds and grades of workers actually engaged in each industry or employment, in the establishments in which it happens for the moment to be carried on, to whatever vocations they belong, their proper share, locally as well as nationally, in the management of their own employment or industry; and on the other side, securing to all the members of each specific vocation, in whatever industries or establishments they may happen to be working, their due participation in the government of the conditions of that vocation.

It remains to be explained that British law still obstructs the Trade Unionists in their desire for a re-grouping of their organisations. The Trade Union Act of 1876 required that any proposal for amalgamation of a registered Trade Union should be carried by a two-thirds' majority of all the members. This majority it was usually impossible to obtain; but not until 1917 did the Government allow the law to be altered, and then only to the extent of requiring a majority of 20 per cent. on a poll of at least half of all the members. Even with this mitigation, it is often found impossible to get a sufficient proportion of the entire membership to vote for a proposal which has secured general agreement; and numerous schemes of amalgamation have failed to comply with the statutory requirements. To get over this difficulty, the ingenious officials of the British Steel Smelters' Trade Union, aiming at a fusion of the six societies existing in the industry, devised a plan which required the assent of only a bare majority of the members voting. Three of the societies agreed to join in constituting a new society, the British Iron, Steel and Kindred Trades' Association, in which all new members

(1) Suggestions on this problem, which was specifically raised by G. D. H. Cole, in his book *The World of Labour*, in 1913, will be found in *Industrial Democracy*, by S. and B. Webb (new edition, 1920), and in the chapter entitled, "The Reorganisation of the Vocational World", in *A Constitution for the Socialist Commonwealth of Great Britain*, by S. and B. Webb, 1920.

should be enrolled, and to which the existing members should be continuously urged voluntarily to transfer their membership. The four societies at the same time created the Iron and Steel Trades' Confederation, to which they formally ceded most of their powers. Under this process, the British Steel Smelters' Society has already become an empty shell, and has been wound up, whilst the others will fall in shortly. The amalgamation has, accordingly, been virtually effected, without compliance with the impracticable requirements of the law. Other Trade Unions have not felt able to follow the example of the well-organised and ably-directed Steel Smelters, and have endeavoured to carry out, according to the statutory requirements, the amalgamations agreed upon—a process which they have often been unable to complete owing to the failure to vote of a sufficient proportion of their members.

Thus, it can hardly be said that British Trade Unionism, which is now vastly stronger and better organised than ever before, has yet found what is likely to be an enduring constitutional form. The difficulties presented by the formation of rival Unions, the adoption of different bases of enrolment, and the consequent overlapping and confusion—to which reference was made in the first edition of "Industrial Democracy" in 1897 (translated into German under the title of *Theorie und Praxis des Britischen Trade Unionismus*)—have, as was therein predicted, not been solved by the extensive and far-reaching amalgamations that have latterly been effected. It may, indeed, be tentatively suggested that it is not along the lines of ever-widening amalgamation that the solution of the problem will be found, but rather in the direction of the construction of a double organisation. The wage-earners may find themselves compelled to recognise the distinction between an increasing participation in the control and management of the particular industrial enterprises in which they are employed, on the one hand, and on the other, the steadily developing regulation and control, by each distinct vocation that becomes conscious of itself as a vocation, of the conditions under which that particular vocation renders to the community its peculiar service. The limits of the industrial enterprise and those of the vocation will be found very seldom to coincide. Hence a double organisation seems indicated, that of the vocation or craft, and that of the employment or industry. If what is required is the formation of new and additional organisations acting for the whole of an industry, whilst leaving to the older societies the function of defending the interests of the craft or vocation, there are two recent precedents of significance. The one is that set by the Iron and Steel Trades' Confederation already referred to. The other is the upgrowth of federations, such as the old-standing federal organisation of the Cotton Operatives, or the more modern attempt of the Woollen Workers, the Transport Workers and the Building Trades.

the industrial federation having definite functions connected with the control of the industry, whilst not interfering with the activities of the separate constituent Unions, directing themselves specifically to controlling the vocation or craft.

An alternative course, which the rival Trade Unions are seldom able to bring themselves to agree to, is that of a double membership, so that workmen may belong simultaneously to one organisation for industrial management, and to another for vocational development and mutual insurance. An important agreement concluded in January, 1921, between two of the most powerful organisations — the Miners' Federation of Great Britain and the Amalgamated Engineering Union — proceeds somewhat on these lines. The Miners' Federation has persistently claimed the allegiance of all the workers in or about the mines of coal and ironstone, to whatever vocations they belonged. The various kinds of engineering workmen employed in connection with mining undertakings have usually joined an engineering Trade Union. By the agreement now come to, these engineering workmen, whilst retaining their membership in the Amalgamated Engineering Union, will also receive a card of membership of the Miners' Federation. They will be included in all applications for advances and in all wage agreements made by the Miners' Federation; they will vote, like the rest of its members, on all such issues, and in case of disputes they will tender notices to cease work simultaneously with the miners. In any such action these engineering members will receive the support of the Amalgamated Engineering Union, to which they pay their contributions, and from which they will receive their benefits. For all purposes of collective bargaining, they rank as miners. In respect of their mutual insurance they remain engineers. A like arrangement seems feasible between the National Union of Railwaymen and the various "craft" Unions enrolling mechanics in the railway workshops.
