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Trades Chambers in France

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THE problem of establishing and organising trades chambers (1) is a pressing one in France, and arises out of the urgent need for restoring the apprenticeship system and for insisting on the compulsory nature of technical education. A great deal of ink has been spilt over the 'apprenticeship crisis'; and it is true that the disappearance of the corporate spirit, advances in mechanical means of production, specialisation, and the existence of various laws tending to make it difficult for a factory to adopt an apprenticeship scheme, are in part an explanation of what is now an undoubted fact. But the real cause of the dislike which is felt for entering a trade are want of education, the high cost of living, and the lack of any general organisation of industrial life. If trades chambers are to prove a remedy for these evils, they will have to assist education, to secure fair wages for apprentices, and to institute some system of factory discipline.

It has been argued that the educational problem has, in fact, already been solved, and the Act of 25 July 1919, known as the Astier Act, is cited as having introduced compulsory technical education. Unfortunately, the compulsory principle is only illusory. It is true that this principle is incorporated in the text of the Act; all young persons of less than eighteen years of age of either sex are, to all appearance, if they are employed in commerce or in industry, obliged under

(1) The trades chambers which have so far been established in France are aiming at encouraging among the general public a respect and love for manual work, at helping on technical education, and at organising apprenticeship. They have as yet no legal basis and owe their origin exclusively to private effort. The trades chamber of Alsace-Lorraine is the only chamber which has been officially constituted, having originally been set up under German law.

In the course of the last few years great efforts have been made to give the trades chambers a legal standing (cf. proposals laid before the Chamber of Deputies by Mr. Bouilloux on 11 Dec. 1917, by Mr de l'Estourbillon on 8 Feb. 1919 and more recently by Mr. Verlot; cf. *Doc. parl.*, Chambre des députés, Annexe 2936. Mr. Caillard, the author of this article, in his book on *Trades Chambers and Trades Councils*, has published a sketch of the principles which in his opinion should govern any future Act on the subject. (Ed. *Inter. Lab. Rev.*).



the terms of the Act to attend technical courses. As a matter of fact, there is no real compulsion and can be none. The penalties laid down in order to secure the carrying out of the provisions of the Act are mere anodynes ; they can never be applied, because the provisions themselves are ambiguous. Any fresh legislation on trades chambers will have to interpret the Astier Act as well as amend it.

The above remarks are by way of preface. Our real subject will be to discuss the principal features of a trades chamber system—granted that that system is to be really useful—and the principal functions which will attach to trades chambers when formed.

THE TRADES CHAMBER SYSTEM

Trades chambers should be regional, autonomous, and wealthy ; further, they should be elective bodies constituted of an equal number of representatives of employers and employed, and their creation should be the result of voluntary initiative.

The Question of the Region

By the word 'region' I mean a territorial area larger than that of the Department. There is no need here to stress the advantages of the region ; they have been discussed often enough. Yet the reform which the word implies is far from being popular among men of common sense. However, such opposition as is shown to 'regionalism' is not directed against the principle involved, so much as against its specific application in such and such a case. It is the old story of local pride and the spirit of the parish-pump getting in the way ; there are no real objections.

It is perfectly obvious, as soon as any discussion of the trades chamber is entered upon, that the Department is too small a unit to allow of the carrying out of all the reforms which expert advisers are demanding. Leaving detail aside, there is the fact that no local budget could bear the expense of setting up certain institutions, the creation of which would be of advantage to trades chambers in general. Again, a disjointed system of apprenticeship, which varied from district to district, would make for confusion. Again and obviously, a multiplicity of trades chambers might be satisfactory to local ambition, but would be a failure where a go-a-head policy was wanted. Voluntary federation between several Departments would only be an apparent remedy ; the organisation would remain one of small, anæmic units, and, in fact, federation would not really operate. It is surely essential to adopt the reverse principle, and to set up regional chambers ; these could then be left to establish branches in the various towns, as seemed advisable. The constitution adopted by the trades chamber of Alsace-Lorraine would be an excellent model.

The really serious objection against the region is that it has no existence except in theory, while the Department is the sole actually existing unit of administration. I have already published a reply to this objection, and have shown that the difficulty is merely one of terminology and can be easily surmounted (*).

The Question of Autonomy

Trades chambers cannot be federated to any other body, neither to chambers of commerce, nor to labour associations, nor to any corporate bodies, unless they are to forfeit their authority and credit.

Two victories must be won in the fight for apprenticeship and for technical education ; one is a victory over the employer, and the other is a victory over the worker. Both employers and workers have been the authors of excellent ideas ; both employers and workers are here and there united into isolated, though well organised, bodies ; but it would be a mistake on this account to imagine that the great bulk whether of employers or of workers are prepared to sacrifice either their material advantage or their opinions for the sake of the common good. When I come to analyse the functions of trades chambers in dealing with the apprenticeship system, I shall show what an immense work still remains to be done. Goodwill, perseverance, and no little caution will be required. Trades chambers, like all new institutions, will be sure to rouse objections. What matters is that no handle should be given for such objections, and this can only be done if the chambers annex a new and undisputed field of activity. There they will have to maintain their position and to repulse all attacks with energy ; the struggle will be a long one, but little by little they will contrive to attract the employer and to inspire him with a keener sense of his duty towards his apprentices, whether it be that he has hitherto looked on apprentices as mere instruments of profit, or whether, owing to a very natural timidity, he has held himself aloof from joining in a necessary effort of collaboration.

Trades chambers, in fact, must be instituted and maintained on the principle of being able to command sufficient independence to make them rallying points, round which will gather all the deepseated forces of labour, as they pursue the generous ideal of raising the worker to a higher position.

The Question of Wealth Question

The existence, or at least the usefulness, of trades chambers will depend on their being able to command permanent and abundant money resources. The Act constituting them

(2) See *Les Chambres de Métiers et les conseils de métiers*, Librairie de l'Enseignement technique, 3 rue Thénard, Paris; by the author of this paper.

is, therefore, very closely connected with the Act for the apprenticeship tax. The Bill for such a tax, which was introduced into the last Chamber by Mr. Constant Verlot, and subsequently dropped by its promoter, was perhaps rather too complicated ; but it could have been amended, and personally I regret that it was abandoned.

The general principle of the Bill was to tax in proportion to the sum paid by the manufacturer when taking out his licence to manufacture. The Verlot proposals struck me as especially admirable in their method of adjusting the yield of the tax to the actual needs of the moment; the tax would have yielded neither too much nor too little, but an amount which would have been most ingeniously adjusted to the situation. It would, therefore, have borne neither too heavily nor too lightly, and the whole system, being in command of funds, would have been able to make great strides.

Almost any other base might be substituted for the licence-tax, for instance, turnover, profits, wages' total, size of staff, or any other criterion. But two principles must positively be kept in mind: one is that the funds obtained must be ample enough to allow of the carrying out of the policy laid down ; and the other is that the special apprenticeship tax should be earmarked for apprenticeship purposes. Fears have been expressed that Parliament will refuse to adopt the latter principle ; yet Mr. Ribot some time ago, speaking as the mouthpiece of the Finance Ministry, did not think this likely. In any case, the problem will have to be dealt with, and it would be a mistake to attempt to evade it for fear of opposition.

If this scheme fails to find acceptance, then we shall have to fall back on the method of budgeting through the chambers of commerce, which will certainly be a simpler method and more likely to find acceptance. Yet the advantages of setting up trades chambers under these circumstances will be exceedingly doubtful ; their resources will be meagre, their policy feeble. The chambers of commerce themselves have done hardly anything at all towards encouraging apprenticeship ; otherwise the problem would never have reached its present acute stage. Only recently two chambers of commerce proposed to tax their members with a view to collecting funds for technical education purposes, and were refused authority to do so by the Ministry. They are held in tutelage. Trades chambers would be subject to an even severer guardianship, and, lacking resources, would not be able to accomplish any more. Where chambers of commerce require tens of thousands of francs to carry on their work, trades chambers would require hundreds of thousands to extend theirs ; but hundreds of thousands of francs cannot be got out of a system which is hermetically sealed at all points.

A broad view and courage are necessary ; the cause is well worth it.

The Question of Election and of Joint Representation

This hardly ranks as a controversial question. Employers and employed have exactly the same rights when it comes to problems of apprenticeship ; they are equally interested in discussing such problems freely and by joint deliberation ; their qualified representatives, appointed to carry on such discussions, are only qualified if and when they hold the definite commission of their fellows to this end. The only doubtful point is to determine whether the trades council³, which is an extremely important local body, shall be the nucleus or the outcome of the trades chamber, in other words, whether the chamber shall proceed from the council, or whether, on the contrary, the council shall hold its powers as from the chamber. I return to this question below.

Voluntary Character of the Chambers

I now come to deal with a simple question of human nature. We have to consider whether trades chambers will be more successful if set up by official order, or, on the contrary, whether they will succeed best if their formation is left to private initiative and to a sense of the unquestionable advantages which they offer. I have no hesitation in saying that, in my opinion, there must be no compulsion if they are to succeed.

However, in saying this I feel I owe my readers a few words of explanation. We have an Act on technical education, an Act which, to be sure, requires to be amended, but that is beside the mark ; we shall soon have another on apprenticeship and the apprenticeship tax. Committees of the Departments and local committees, constituted of members nominated by the Ministry or the Prefects, are carrying out, or will proceed to carry out, the provisions of these Acts. This is the general principle which obtains in all our legislation, fiscal or educational, and a very good principle it is too. Nevertheless, if employers and workers should think it more interesting to manage their own affairs instead of referring them to government agents, why should they not do so ? I am well aware that if they wish to assume so great a responsibility, they must be able to act as those who have come to man's estate, and it is precisely with a view to such a state of affairs that the voluntary character of trades chambers is here advanced. Who should be better authorised than those who are in the trade themselves to direct technical education and to organise apprenticeship ? In addition, they must

(3) *Conseils de métiers.*

both have the wish to attack these questions and also be capable of handling them. When they have unmistakably proved both wish and capacity, then the official Department committee will disappear, and the trades chamber will, as a freely elected body, enter into the inheritance of its powers and functions; then the local committee also will yield to a committee of the trades council nominated by experts. Such is the outline of a scheme which I had the honour to propose (4).

Its adoption or rejection is hardly the immediate question; my object was to sketch the general principles involved. If Acts which aim at emancipation,—and Acts which aim at raising the technical value of the worker are primarily Acts which aim at emancipation—if such Acts outstrip public opinion so as to come to shipwreck on the rocks of a heavy indifference, their results will be mediocre. But if there is behind them some such stimulating factor as I have described, then there is every chance that they will gradually give rise to the happiest effects in proportion to the growing reform of opinion in general. What lies in front of us is an educative process. An Act which includes, in principle, certain advantages to the worker and also supplies the motive which will induce every worker to seek those advantages is an Act of rich possibilities.

FUNCTIONS OF TRADES CHAMBERS

The functions of trades chambers will be to encourage a taste for manual labour and a respect for it among the public, to organise, direct, and control apprenticeship, to assist in founding and maintaining technical schools and technical courses, and to take all legal measures likely to serve the interests of their trades.

The Encouragement of Manual Labour

Encouragement of manual labour implies both vocational selection and a higher moral standing for skilled labour as such. The study of the problem of vocational selection has been enriched by a remarkable report issued by the

(4) A good test as to whether the members of a trade intend to be the managers of their own interests will be the enthusiasm with which they record their votes. For instance, if one-sixth of the number of registered electors vote for the trades council or the trades chamber, such council or chamber could be considered as established. But if the electors show an indifference equal to what they show in the elections to the probiviral courts (*conseils de prud'hommes*) and the chambers of commerce and commercial courts, the election should be considered null and void and the government committees, i.e. the Department or local committees, nominated by the government authorities, will continue to function.

Department of Technical Education. This report was inspired by the ideas of Mr. Julien Fontègne, Professor at the Technical School at Strassburg, who has made an exhaustive study of the problem. I cannot do better than summarise it.

Mr. Fontègne defines the problem as an economic problem, because the aim pursued is to furnish production with a sufficient supply of skilled labour and to make the best possible use of the human factor in the course of organising work. He defines it as a social problem, because the aim is also to give greater satisfaction to the individual (and, consequently to society as a whole), by allotting to each person such opportunities as will enable him to succeed in some career which is suitable to his capacities and his taste.

The problem of vocational selection will be solved by attention to two things : a study of vocations and a study of children. Detailed studies are required, founded on the comparison of documents resting on good authority, and no organisations will be better qualified to collect such documents and to investigate them than the trades chambers; by this means it will be possible to make an exact estimate of the advantages or disadvantages of any one trade, as also of the capacities and temperament needed in those who wish to take it up. This implies a great deal of trouble and a great deal of time ; but when that trouble has once been taken, the results will be final ; it will only be necessary to alter details from time to time, in order to bring them up to date.

The study of the children will be a more laborious task. It will involve an endless repetition of fresh enquiries, each separate and each different, enquiries into the physical and the intellectual aptitudes of the child, into his educational standard and moral endowment, such a task, in fact, as will require the delicate adjustment of the relative part to be played by doctor, master, and parent.

Nor is this all. A mere census and classification of the number of recruits who can be suitably drafted into the various trades would be a useless heaping up of figures, unless at the same time a live register can be kept of the state of the labour market and unless persuasive action can be taken to direct the flow of recruits, not earmarked by nature for a particular industry, according to the economic requirements of the hour.

This brief sketch will have sufficed to prove the complexity of the problem. The practical aspects of that problem seem to be so serious that many responsible thinkers are inclined to consider the attempted organisation of vocational selection in a government department to be a mere chimera; in the determination of a career the number of factors superimposed on the factor of scientific investigation is so enormous. It is hardly surprising if the attempt to systematise what cannot be systematised should on occasion have been compared with one of those oriental projects over which the mandarin would ponder away his life. I must confess I am

tempted to take this view myself. But knowing the supreme importance of moral suasion and a propaganda which, leaving aside all statistical or deceptive investigation, makes its appeal simply to the good sense of the head of the family, I am prepared to say that such suasion and propaganda are peculiarly the function of the trades chambers. What they require for this purpose is not a medical consulting-room of doctors or an office-full of card-indices, but a staff of ready, authoritative, and convinced speakers, who are themselves members of a trade. These speakers will go where attention will be paid to what they say, they will go to schools, to popular fêtes and meetings. There they will describe the advantages of the various trades and will detail the educational and technical opportunities available for those who wish to profit by those advantages. I put greater faith in the speaker's platform than I do in the laboratory. Whatever publications of the movement appear, if they are to be alive and convincing, ought, in my opinion, to be by the hand of retired workers and not produced from the pigeon-holes of a Ministry. This is where vocational selection merges into the principle of giving greater prestige to manual work as such, and where the work of the trades chambers begins to be educative.

The Organisation, Inspection, and Control of Apprenticeship

Organisation is the first and most important thing and at the same time the one to which least attention is paid. It is all very well to talk about making apprenticeship compulsory and forcing the employer to take apprentices in proportion to the size of his staff; such an idea cannot even be discussed until we know that workshops are organised to manage apprenticeship in a satisfactory way, which is far from being the case.

I have dealt with this question on a former occasion, when I made some remarks on an apprenticeship Bill brought forward by Messrs. Michel and Mascraud, and I shall deal with all essential points here by recalling what I said on that occasion.

Of all the conditions which are requisite for a proper organisation of the apprenticeship system, the first is to make the factory a habitable place, physically and morally. To make it habitable physically is a relatively easy thing to do. A large number of factories have already done what is necessary to this end, although there are also a large number of others which have done nothing at all, especially among those employing women. More severe measures than those which are at present in force—which, in spite of their mildness, arouse so much opposition—should, in the interests of young persons and of their health, be taken against these unmodernised back-shops.

To make the factory morally fit to live in involves more detailed investigation and more complicated action. At bottom the employer in his factory has much the same duties as the schoolmaster in his school-room. The Bill proposed by Messrs. Michel and Mascuraud, which reflects the feeling in commercial and industrial circles, admits this and more. Under the terms of this Bill the employer is not only the moral supervisor of his apprentices within his own factory premises, but is called upon, in addition, to watch over their "conduct and behaviour" outside the works; this conforms to the tradition of the old French apprenticeship rules. But though it is simple enough to write these words into the text of a Bill, there is dismay in the thought of taking the measures which would make them something more than mere words. Are those employers who are in favour of compulsory apprenticeship contracts prepared to take upon their shoulders the burden of organising themselves in the necessary way, in order to cover these heavy responsibilities?

An apprenticeship system would lay upon the employer other equally definite and equally just responsibilities. But these responsibilities must be translated into action. Messrs. Michel and Mascuraud's proposals require that "the employer instruct his apprentices in the trade mentioned in the apprenticeship contract progressively and completely". To demand progressive instruction is to make an end of unscientific method in apprenticeship; it means that factories will deal with their apprentices on principles which are not exclusively directed to increasing output, but are formulated with a view to the individual or joint instruction of those who are beginners in the trade. What will be aimed at will be a graduated series of lessons, which do not take too great an account of the quantity of material which may be spoilt, but which do pay great attention to providing tasks arranged in order of progressive difficulty, so that the learner may find the way to knowledge opened out before him; if this is to be done, then the master hands, the very élite of the workers, will have to be the men to probe these difficult problems to the bottom, and to initiate the apprentice into what is a thousand times more difficult than mere study, the making and mounting of an exact piece of mechanism; if this is to be done, it means, of course, that this systematic teaching must be given under the best material conditions, or, in other words, in a room specially set apart and specially equipped for the purpose.

To demand "complete" instruction is to demand that any hasty specialisation be avoided, or any premature classification of the worker. It means that, when the apprentice has learnt one process, he should pass to the next, and not yield to the temptation of applying the one he has already learnt with a view to money-making; it means that the employer's outlook must embrace more than his own factory,

that he must be disinterested enough and generous enough to finish the task laid upon him by having recourse to further studies and other instruction ; he must be able to put his worker's interest before his own.

If the organisation of an apprenticeship system requires all this, a heavy task will be laid on the trades chambers. In addition, they will have to deal with inspection. The task of inspection follows on the task of organisation, for, if legal provisions which are mere words standing in the text of a law and having no operation are to be avoided, so also is the setting up of any system of organisation which is divorced from inspection.

Not all factories are suited to receive apprentices ; the Act will not be carried out by allowing any and every factory to state its own organisation to be a good one, when, as a matter of fact, it is only equipped to give a partial training. In the *General Report on French Industry* we read that "the big factories are tending to adopt intensive methods of manufacture ; the specialisation practised often ends in requiring from the worker the merest repetition of a few limited movements ; such factories are quite unsuited to deal with apprenticeship, as apprenticeship was formerly understood". The question is whether the smaller factories will be any better equipped. Some of them perhaps will be so ; but inspection is undoubtedly called for. The following quotation of a passage in my book on trades chambers will make this point clear ⁽⁵⁾.

It has been said that you small metal-works employers pretend to take apprentices and then confine yourselves to teaching them to put the spoons on coffee-pots, to solder a neck on a tin can, and to add the handle to coal-scuttles ; as soon as ever you think that you can make some money out of them, you put them on to regular work ; to get them used to it you begin on the half piece-rate system, i.e. you pay them half a day on piece-rates and half a day on hour-rates ; they are soon put on to piece-rates entirely and take home quite respectable wages. How pleased their parents are ! Your critics have only to add that your methods are about as degrading as they well can be for the boy himself.

Again, it is said that you machine-makers employ your boys on jobs about which your signed contract knows nothing. They were full of hope when they came to you, but the small amount of real bench-work which they have been allowed to do has thoroughly discouraged them. The workmen are quite indifferent to their attempts ; if they ask a man who is on piece-work, he swears at them ; if they ask a man on hour-rates, their reception is not a whit better, he having no orders to look after them, but only to get a good day's work done. The observer reporting added very bitterly : 'That is how hatred comes, the logical outcome of trade dishonesty' ⁽⁶⁾.

The exact truth of these statements hardly matters ; the mere fact that they can be made justifies inspection on the most careful system. To prevent this kind of thing,

⁽⁵⁾ *Rapport général sur l'industrie française*: Vol. 1, p. 91.

⁽⁶⁾ From a speech by Mr. Rembert, tinplate worker, before the Educational League.

trades chambers will have to set up committees with powers to enter factories at any moment, both those which are well run have nothing to conceal, and others where want of conscientiousness is a danger to society.

The principle of inspection, in its turn, merges indistinguishably into that of control, so that it is difficult to separate the two ideas. But the principle of control includes the idea of a penalty ; and on this topic a few remarks are called for.

The successful completion of a term of apprenticeship should be stated on a service-certificate. This idea is not a new one. The outline of it appears in the Astier Act in the form of a diploma of technical proficiency ; but it can only bear fruit if the trades chambers, or rather the trades councils, are charged with carrying it out. Boys and girls who have completed their term of apprenticeship should be called up before a jury of trade experts and tested with a view to proving that they are now fit to exercise their trade as workmen or work women. If they can do so, they will receive a certificate which will give them the right on engagement to a minimum wage, calculated on the rates laid down for learners by the trades boards. The examination will take the form of their doing a specimen piece of work which will allow their practical efficiency to be tested; this will be the principal part of the examination and failure in it will disqualify the candidate. But it will not be the sole test; knowledge of technique and drawing will also be tested. Candidates successful in all parts of the test will receive a certificate.

Personally, I have no hesitation in going a great deal further. My opinion is, and always has been, that the old quarrel between technical school and workshop — which, by the way, is still going on — is based on a quibble. Those who say 'the technical schools cannot deal with apprentices; they must go to the workshop', are simply thinking of the technical school as it is, but of the factory as it might be ideally. But where the technical school really is what it might be, it combines all the advantages without exception which might be offered even by the workshop best equipped from the point of view of the apprenticeship system; in other words, it offers the advantages of a daily wage and the interest aroused by the carrying out of a contract under ordinary industrial conditions. I will here abstain from further discussion on this topic, as I have crossed swords about it on a former occasion. On the other hand, when the workshop is capable of training apprentices in a true and honest way, the reason is that it is organised on the lines of a technical school, or rather, because it is a technical school. It is therefore useless to dispute about the meaning of two words which denote the same thing.

I have no wish to flinch from the logical consequences of

my own argument and I am perfectly ready to follow it out to its logical conclusion. I am willing to admit that certain trades, a great many trades, in fact, cannot be taught within the walls of a school building; they can only be learnt in the daily atmosphere, in the daily toil, of the dockyard and workshop. What I am not willing to admit is that the conception of the technical school should be narrowed down to the conception obtaining in what we might call the classical or middle ages. I once more repeat what I have always said: that the solution of the problem of the technical school is to have no technical schools. If I may be permitted to use the term, I should say that the technical school ought, both theoretically and practically, to fit itself into the exigencies of practical instruction; it exists, or rather it could exist, wherever conditions favour apprenticeship. It cannot exist if run by the red-tape of a government Department without inevitably lapsing back into the old style. Official rules and regulations are uniform and therefore incapable of elasticity, and no government, not even the best-intentioned or the most keenly aware of what practical teaching should be, can forego the pleasure of issuing regulations. The further the work of the schools extends, the closer is the network of instructions and circulars which hem them in and which become all-embracing, which, in other words, destroy their separate personalities and reduce them all to one pattern-school. Every step along this road is a step along the road of destroying that elasticity of instruction which the teaching of a trade requires. Trades schools will never escape the absorbing force of the main current of our educational traditions unless they are run by the workers themselves. The means of ensuring this are sufficiently simple. The worker's certificate must be recognised as an obligatory diploma and as the sole one granted by the trades school; no school should be allowed to assume the title of a trades school or similar school, unless its students are successful in the tests. Hereby obstructive regulations will automatically vanish, for the carpentry or ceramics school will necessarily adopt a different constitution, just as it adopts a different curriculum, from that adopted by the moulders' school, always supposing that it wishes to have its teaching licensed by the carpentry or ceramics trades council. To sum up: let us put into the hands of the regional trades chambers the task of selecting the jury and of fixing the tests which shall apply in common to the practical industrial schools, the vocational schools, the trades schools, and the apprenticeship workshops, and we shall do more towards raising the standard of technical skill than by any other means. Throughout, however, we are presupposing that the trades chambers are entirely independent bodies with independent budgets producing very abundant resources.

Technical Schools and Technical Courses

In the course of my detailed explanation of the definition which I gave of trades chambers, I am compelled both to comment on such terms as I have used, and also to explain why I am abstaining from using other terms which naturally suggest themselves. Is it, for example, to be inferred from my definition of trades chambers as bodies whose function it is to encourage and support technical schools and technical courses, that these chambers are not themselves entitled to start such schools and courses? No such inference can be made. They are undoubtedly entitled to do so, as is formally stated in the text of the 1919 Act. These bodies are, above all, trade associations and as such are entitled to set up trades schools, either on their own initiative or in conjunction with other bodies, or with Departments, communes, or chambers of commerce. Technical courses may be started by any individual or by any organisation. It would be waste of time to discuss this subject further.

The function of the trades chambers in encouraging and supporting trades schools is propagandist in its nature and also financial; propagandist, as the very wording of my definition implies; financial, as I shall proceed to explain below, and as the general definition of their functions would lead one to infer. But, in addition to the trades schools, there are the practical industrial schools and technical schools of all kinds, supported by funds from the communes, Departments, or government; all these schools are open to apprentices, and it is therefore to their advantage that they should not be isolated, but should come within the sphere of influence of the trades chambers. For this reason the authority of the trades chambers should be made to extend beyond a single type of public school (7).

After having assisted in the founding of trades schools, the trades chambers will 'assist in maintaining them'. Here the financial factor enters in. There is, however, yet another factor, which I have attempted to embrace within my suggested definition. It is a principle which has but scant chance of being adopted, for it is difficult, and perhaps even a trifle imprudent, to stand for principles which run counter to the spirit of our traditional educational system. Our educational system is profoundly rooted in the past, perhaps as much by its terminology as by anything else. I have already given my own idea of what the word 'school' means. But the authorities, while willing to allow the technical school to enter

(7) Under the Act of 25 July 1919 trades schools are defined as public schools.

into the sphere of the technical expert, refuse to allow the technical expert an entry into the educational sphere; he might upset educational tradition. I am unable to share these fears. On the contrary, my hope is that great good would come of his help, and that is why I should be glad to see the technical expert have the official entry, under certain reservations, to the official courses and the official schools. It is by this means, above all, that he will be able to 'assist in maintaining' them.

The Encouragement of Trade Interests

Whether the trades chambers will be able to handle the big programme of initiating all appropriate legal measures calculated to encourage the interests of their trade will depend on the extent of the power, and the amount of the resources, which they will enjoy. Many will hold that such a programme is altogether too bold. I have tried to sum it up briefly, as follows: "Trades chambers shall be able, within their own district, to form or to subsidise any institution, organisation, or arrangement which is calculated to encourage technical education and apprenticeship, or to advance their trade, such as loan-banks, warehouses, wholesale houses, auction rooms, distributive and producers' co-operative societies, exhibitions of a temporary or permanent nature, libraries, technical museums, laboratories, trades schools; in general, they shall be competent to initiate every kind of collective enterprise which bears on technical education, apprenticeship, or trade interests, whether alone, or in conjunction with other trades chambers or chambers of commerce, or with the state, the Departments, or the communes".

With the grant of these powers trades chambers would be in a position equal to that of the chambers of agriculture, which already have them; they would, in practice, be able to act and to exercise an influence which would multiply their usefulness ten times over. It can scarcely be denied that they will never be wealthy bodies, if their resources are restricted to what can be got out of a tax — which I am afraid few people will pay — and out of chance gifts and legacies. They will have to be allowed to make money on their own account, and this can be done if they are endowed, not merely with the powers which it is agreed on all hands should be theirs, but also with the right to carry on public business enterprises. This is the gist of my whole argument. Trades chambers ought to be repositories of that practical power which is the result of education and a concrete example of the usefulness and force inherent in the principle of collaboration and association. When once the small business man has realised the opportunities of progress which the trades chamber offers him, he and his fellows will tend to unite together in a way which will

be the salvation of them all. I did not hesitate to suggest, therefore, that trades chambers should be empowered to submit tenders and to accept contracts for public works and public services. I have been greatly struck by the advantages of the co-operative system in all countries where it has been put into practice; it permits of small businesses joining together in order to undertake important contracts which they could not have managed individually. The job is shared out and partial unemployment thus avoided, profitable work is secured for each contractor, and the whole national resources are brought into play, three advantages which are well worth consideration. Fortunately, I am not alone in arguing for this course; a great many manufacturers think it will be the salvation of industry and of the small business man. I need only quote a communication sent to me by Mr. Bourdillon, who is himself an employer and an associate of the College of Arts and Manufactures and whose writings on the organisation of the trades chambers in France have attracted so much notice. Mr. Bourdillon says: "We ought to stress the co-operative side of the work of the trades chambers much more than we have done. In addition to what they can do for apprenticeship and technical education, there is plenty of scope for an economic defence movement, which would make them enormously popular in this country. I know how useful the trades chamber of Alsace-Lorraine has been to the small business man, in making joint purchases of raw material, selling manufactured products, and procuring designs and models".

In fact, the right conception of a trades chamber is that of a powerful and respected body, which, not being under the necessity of making profits, can pay away large sums out of its surplus to further great vital works of public interest.

THE ORGANISATION OF TRADES CHAMBERS

Our fear, nevertheless, is that the problem will be handled in a spirit of timidity and narrowmindedness. To speak with perfect sincerity, I am compelled to state the worst and to say that I fear this spirit most when it presents itself under the guise of liberalism, which is its most effective concealment. Everybody is agreed that these bodies should have a great deal of independence; they must not, however, be deprived, under the plea of autonomy, of means of information and opportunities of action and be finally reduced to isolation and impotence. I must explain myself as follows. Apprenticeship and technical education are the business of the employer and the business of the worker; that is true enough; but they are also the business of the state. There is legislation in existence on these questions, and, if this legislation is to be put into force through the agency of the trades chambers

it will be essential that the chambers should be in touch with the state authorities and the authorities with the chambers. Imagine, for instance, what the position would be if the technical education and apprenticeship inspectors, who go everywhere and are well informed on current affairs, were not to be allowed to attend the trades chambers ; they would obviously act independently. Or, on the other hand, imagine a trades chamber which was resolved to pass regulations of general application and to see that they were enforced : how could this be done without the assistance of the administrative authorities ? The chamber could hardly cherish the illusion that one of its members, whether employer or worker, could impose penalties. It would be useless, if not impossible, to issue instructions, if the position of the government representatives, together with the authority they hold in virtue both of this position and of their official duties, were ignored. The idea of avoiding contact with the administrative authorities is based on an entire misconception of their nature, which regards them as those entitled to command, whereas they are, in fact, only agents acting under the commands of others. If trades chambers are unable to make use of them, then they will be without a weapon ; another powerless organisation will have been established, which will begin its career in academic discussion and end it in confusion.

Real liberalism should have clearer vision. Those who wish to govern must use the instruments of government. A free government means that those to whose hands these instruments are committed are at all times subordinate and subject to dismissal.

To speak plainly, the trades chambers would be making a mistake, in my opinion, were they to adopt that form of constitution which consists in having a rigidly equal number of representatives from both sides. This leads me to a very brief sketch of the skeleton of the organisation as I understand it.

In the first place, there is the trades council, which is a body always constituted of an equal number of representatives on either side, elected respectively by the employers and the employees of the same trade. Where possible, i.e. where the density of the industrial population in any group permits of it, several allied trades will be allowed to join together and elect a single trades council ; the principle which will have to be followed will vary according to the nature of the case, but no general rule ought to be laid down to classify trades, for instance, into ten or fifteen groups, for this would usually result in robbing the electors of any kind of interest in the councils. In towns where the population exceeds 100,000 several trades councils will be set up, to deal with the different trades or with different groups of trades. These councils will give their opinion on the regulation of apprenticeship,

the minimum wages to be paid to apprentices, and the nature, character, duration, and curriculum of the technical courses in their district. With the guarantee of the trades chambers they may found trades schools.

Secondly, there will be the local committee, which will cover a group of communes, a single commune, or, in large towns, a part of a commune. The employers who are members of the trades councils on the one hand, and the workers on the other hand, will elect their representatives. In addition, there will be representatives of the municipal council — for it must not be forgotten that the commune is responsible for the financial side — while instructors of apprentices and heads of trades schools or technical courses will attend, at any rate in a consultative capacity. A body of this kind, enjoying expert advice and directly controlled by its electors, who would in many cases collaborate with it in carrying out arrangements, would have greater power of action and fuller authority than the local committees set up by the Astier Act. It would assume all the functions of these committees (which would then cease to exist), as well as others too numerous to mention.

In the third place, there would be the regional trades chambers, with their Department sections. At least three-fourths of their members would be elected in equal numbers by the employers and workers of the trades council of the district. Though they would be independent of the Department and the commune, they would necessarily be in touch with both ; and for this reason it would be in their interest to give a seat to a representative of the municipality and to the mayor of the town which they make their headquarters. For the same reason, and also on account of the importance of their being able to exercise direct and friendly action on these officials, they should include among their members the divisional inspector of labour and at least two inspectors of technical education, including the inspector-general for the district.

Some of their functions have been mentioned above ; it is not necessary to mention them all, but it may be desirable to point out that they would collect taxes, dues, and premiums in return for the services which they would render ; that they would regulate apprenticeship methods according to the conditions obtaining in various trades ; that they would draw up a list of the establishments, workshops, and schools which would be authorised to train apprentices ; and that they would appoint representatives, who would have the right to supervise these establishments and to make complaints in case of any breach of the laws which the chambers had to apply or of the regulations which they had issued. As regards technical education, they would take the place of the Department committees provided for by the Astier Act. They would assume all the functions of these committees, except the statutory functions connected with the opening, closing, and

control of private schools. As the Department committees are abolished, the latter functions would be transferred to a Department board for technical education, which would be similar to the University board and would have parallel competence.

There remains the fourth and last authority. Up to the present, the activities proposed have been confined to workshops and technical courses in the case of the trades councils, to the communes in the case of the local committees, and to the Departments and regions in the case of the trades sections and trades chambers. Necessary as these concentric circles may be, it will be clear to everyone that something more is required for harmonious action, and that it is absolutely necessary to provide for liaison between all these bodies. It is necessary not only to unite them all in one federation, but also to connect that federation with the government authorities, just as, in the lower branches, the predominating elective elements were connected with the Department and local administrations. This final connecting body, which would at the same time form an apex to the whole organisation, would be the Office for Apprenticeship and Technical Education (7).

The problems of apprenticeship and technical education can only be solved by an organisation which is built up on a solid foundation and independent of administrative changes. It would be an error in construction to allow a body of administrative officials to function at the centre, with nothing to counterbalance them, while at the terminal and intermediate points there are elected bodies in the form of trades chambers and trades councils. There would soon be a split between the two authorities, because they would derive from different principles. This would come about all the more quickly because the administrative officials would be drawn in one direction by the current to which I have already alluded, while the representatives of the trades chambers and trades councils would be drawn in a contrary direction.

I spoke of a split, but would this be all? Probably not, for the position could scarcely be riper for threatening a conflict of powers. At present the central authorities are very well disposed towards trades councils. But there is no sufficient safeguard in this, for there is no guarantee that the same spirit will prevail tomorrow. In any case, it is mere prudence as well as a sound rule in architecture to construct the top of the building in the same style as the lower storeys. In the lower branches of the organisation, the members of a trade decide what is to be done, and official authority carries it out, and is bound to do so (8).

(7) *Office de l'Apprentissage et de l'Enseignement professionnel*

(8) This reasoning assumes that the trades chambers are organised on the system described above.

At the top the Office should still include the administrative element, not in the form of consultative boards or subordinate committees, but in that of an authoritative assembly.

It is not in the interest either of the state or of the trades chambers that they should be completely divorced from each other. With all appreciation of the results already obtained, it must be pointed out that official action is slow, while that of private groups is lacking in decision. The reason is that these two creative forces, the government on the one hand and trade associations on the other, have up to the present been acting separately. Close co-operation between them is to be desired. State institutions, if placed directly under the control and influence of members of a trade, would carry on their work with more assurance, while if trade associations were assisted by the government authorities, their undertakings would not remain mere abortive attempts. If, on the other hand, the state is allowed complete control in a sphere which demands methods with which it is not familiar, the experience of the past will only be repeated. The attempt to provide special instruction and modern instruction is a case in point. These ideas of a short time ago were quite good, but their application was deplorable. Today, both the idea and its application are obsolete. If technical education falls into the 'classical' groove, it will suffer the same fate. The crew which mans the vessel should be maintained, but there should be another hand at the helm. Yet it would be a mistake to trust the solution of the problem of modernising the methods of practical education to members of the trades alone. Their action would be too slow. They would be occupied by too many considerations, and they would inevitably hand over the work to secretarial officials with no special competence. Really efficient executive powers are only to be found with the public authorities. It is most important that the federation of trades chambers should make use of these authorities. This can be done if the Office for Apprenticeship and Technical Education is set up and organised in the right way.

SUGGESTED REFORMS

It thus appears that the question of apprenticeship and that of technical education are connected. This is, in fact, the case. The latter, however, has a rough road ahead of it.

The first step is the amendment of the Astier Act, which should be undertaken openly and thoroughly. This is the only means of giving a free field to the trades chambers.

I do not propose to refer at this point to the scheme which I have described elsewhere. At the beginning of the present article, however, I stated that the provisions of the Act were

ambiguous, and I must at least explain the urgent reform which is necessary as regards one point of capital importance for the future of industry.

The abuse must first be described. The proposed remedy can then be stated.

Paragraph 2 of Section 44 states that "compulsory technical courses (for apprentices) shall take place during legal working hours". Immediately afterwards Paragraph 3 of the same Section revokes this categorical statement: "the obligation... does not apply to establishments, workshops, shops, or offices in which the normal working hours of the employees do not exceed eight per day or forty-eight per week". As the 8-hour day is the normal régime in France, it is clear that the obligation laid down by the Act has no sense.

This is confusion. We now come to chaos. I am aware — I believe I was the first to point out this further anomaly — that if the letter were strictly observed, and not the spirit which inspired the exemption in question, the reservation concerning workshops where only eight hours per day are worked would itself have no sense. It would consequently fall to the ground, leaving the categorical text of Paragraph 2 intact. The wording is not, in fact, exactly as quoted above. The passage should read: "The obligation of *organising courses* does not apply to establishments, etc." This again has no meaning, as the obligation of organising courses is not mentioned anywhere else in the Act and consequently does not exist, either for factories where eight hours are worked or for those where ten or twelve hours would be worked if possible. All that is provided for by the preceding Sections is the obligation of allowing apprentices the necessary freedom to attend courses. Phraseology which requires so much twisting in order to produce regulations which are capable of application is useless in practice.

Any attempt to clear up the meaning of the Act again raises the whole question of the principle of compulsion, which is being hotly discussed at the present time. Two contradictory arguments are brought forward. The first is the argument which was so extensively quoted before the 8-hour day was introduced: the apprentice is necessary for the work of the factory and the provisions of the Act allow him to be employed for as long a period as the worker; there is no reason why he should not attend courses after hours. The second is as follows: it is inadmissible that the Act should demand more of the adolescent than of the mature man by imposing a longer working day on the former.

As regards the first argument, is it really true that the apprentice is absolutely necessary for the working of the factory at all times? If the answer is in the affirmative, it should be supported by proof, and the proof consists in the amount of wages given to the apprentice. A certain price must be paid for an employee whose permanent attendance is necessary

for the satisfactory working of a factory. Again, is there any industrial establishment in which the apprentice is not obliged to leave his really useful work, i. e. the work which contributes to his technical improvement, for at least four hours a week, which is the minimum time laid down for the compulsory courses? But if the apprentice can be unemployed, or employed on work other than that which he is supposed to be engaged on, for four hours a week without the work of the factory suffering, can it not be maintained that these four hours would be more advantageously spent on the courses? Thus the whole question reduces itself to the right arrangement of the time-table. Finally, if in a few special industries the apprentice has to work in a shift and cannot interrupt his work, it would not be impossible to arrange for an alternation between apprenticed labourers and journeymen.

Petty as these objections and arguments are, the question is only too often regarded from this standpoint. As soon as we cease to regard the matter from an exclusively one-sided point of view, and weigh the inconvenience of a slight change of habits against the interests of the apprentice, and, we may add, against the general interest, it might be thought that the discussion would be closed. But this is not so, and discussion generally continues as follows: 'Very well, we admit that the right of the apprentice to technical education should take precedence of our personal convenience; but why do you not try to provide him with such education out of working hours?' I admit that an agreement appears possible on this basis, though only on condition that mutual concessions are made. It would certainly be a compromise, and would only be admissible on condition that the Act should include a formal obligation to reserve at least four hours of the working week for the courses, and that all exceptions should only be allowed by way of experiment and only maintained if it were proved that attendance at the classes was efficiently supervised by the employers.

A proposal of this kind can only be justified if we abandon theory and work in the light of experience. It has been observed that apprentices do not attend courses regularly unless their attendance is supervised by their employer. But the employer ceases to supervise unless he is compelled. There are exceptions, but however characteristic and praiseworthy they may be, they are only isolated cases. Some practical means of making attendance at courses compulsory must therefore be found. If means better than what I propose can be suggested, they will be adopted — as soon as they are recognised to be efficient — by all who are interested in technical education. Meanwhile I consider it perfectly reasonable to allow exemptions to employers who do their duty and to refuse them to others. There can be no objection to this system, if every precaution is taken to make the granting or refusal of exemptions depend on this principle alone. This

is a detail which can easily be arranged. The setting up of trades chambers will make it possible to provide satisfactory guarantees of impartiality.

A duty is in question, and I am convinced that employers are willing to fulfil it. It is not true that the parents of the apprentice are solely responsible for his education and his conduct as soon as he has left the factory. Industry should assume continuous responsibility in a moral sense for technical education during apprenticeship, because it is industry which reaps the permanent advantage. It is not a matter of indifference to the employer whether he benefit by the satisfactory training of the apprentice, or the reverse. It must be part of his duty to co-operate actively in arrangements ensuring that the apprentice shall be well trained outside the factory.

But above all these arguments of interest stand the principles of trade solidarity, which were perfectly well understood in the time of the guilds, and have not been destroyed by the change in industrial methods. These principles are indestructible, so much so that all recent Bills dealing with the mutual obligations of employers and apprentices refer to them, and all forms of apprenticeship agreements embody them. Moreover, there is not a single enlightened employer who does not realise that this supervision will contribute to strengthen the bonds of good feeling between employer and employed, which at present are too much relaxed, and to reinforce his authority, granted that he exercise it carefully.

