

Trades Unions and Political Parties

By AUGUST BEBEL

Translated by E. H. Thomas

THE speech on the subject designated by the title of this pamphlet, which I made May 31, 1900 at the public convention of the lithographers, engravers and allied trades, held at the Trades Union Hall in Berlin, has called out a lively discussion at meetings and in the press.

Although the subject on which I spoke has been publicly discussed for a considerable time—I myself had already spoken on it in February of this year in Weisensee, near Berlin, a lecture which remained entirely unnoticed, since no report of it appeared—the discussion has become more lively in consequence of my last lecture and has embraced the widest circles. However, since my remarks have been much misunderstood, perhaps because they were not quite correctly reported—correctness is hard to get in the daily press—a repetition of my remarks in print may not be out of place. In this I have not kept to the wording of my speech, but only to its line of thought; and because of the discussion which has meantime arisen, I will treat many points in full which I did not touch upon orally.

I must first, however, defend myself against a misrepresentation in a part of the bourgeois press, that I spoke in favor of non-political unions, or advocated a sort of neutrality, which means the same thing. I never had and could not have any such intention. A non-political union, in respect to anything which the workingmen could gain by such an organization, would be a knife without handle or blade. In the class struggle, it would be no weapon to keep the capitalists in awe, but a plaything at which they would smile.

What I had to say in my speech was twofold. First, I wished to speak against the motion recently adopted by many union members that the trades union movement *per se* is the *main* thing, and that the political movement is a secondary matter. This was the chief reason for my speech at Weisensee. Next I wished to show what tasks the trades union can accomplish, and what it cannot, and that in order to accomplish its tasks it must admit the greatest possible number of trades workers—best of all, every trade worker—which is only possible when it holds aloof from party politics proper and does not consider itself an *appendage* of any political party. But the trades unionist ought to be a *party man*, not as a trades unionist, *but as a class-conscious workingman*, who is a member of a state and a society organism which uses and abuses him as a worker.

ON THE HISTORY OF THE TRADES UNIONS.

TO rightly understand the present conditions and difficulties of the German trades unions, a brief review of their rise and development is necessary.

The rise of German trades unionism differs essentially from the rise of English unionism. The English union movement arose from the class struggle of the English workingmen with the employers. No political party stood by its cradle, served as its nurse and took it under its protection.

It was otherwise in Germany.

The labor movement, which was born in Germany in the revolutionary period, met an early death, before it had come to years of understanding. It came to its end through the reaction which begun in the second half of the year 1849 and lasted till the end of 1850. The decree of the Bundestag at Frankfort (the representation of the governments united in the German Bund) was therefore almost superfluous. This decree provided that workingmen's societies, and especially those with Socialistic or communistic tendencies, should be forbidden once and forever, a decree which anticipated the later anti-Socialist law. But when, at the close of the fifties, the political stagnation came to an end, when the middle class resumed its political activity, and formed the National Union as its organization, the working class also began to start into life.

During the reaction period, industry on a large scale had made tremendous progress and a modern working class had been created which by reason of its numbers was already a powerful factor. The German bourgeoisie knew this, and so did its political exponent, Liberalism.

Just as soon as the workingmen began to bestir themselves and form societies—and these societies in the years 1860 to 1863 sprung out of the ground like mushrooms after a warm summer rain—all kinds of liberal spokesmen tried to get control of these societies. In all sorts of ways they placed themselves at the head of these organizations, in order to get the leadership of these societies in their own hands and protect their members against any dangerous tendencies that might come up.

The communistic and Socialistic ideas which had become noticeable in the years of agitation through the propaganda of the Communist Bund and Weitling's agitation, were unknown to the generation of workingmen who had grown up in complete political ignorance under the pressure of years of reaction. Among the older generations of the working class they were as good as forgotten. Yet the bourgeoisie held them in remembrance and did all in their power to prevent their possible reappearance.

But in vain. In the Leipzig Workingmen's Association (Gewerblicher Bildungsverein), founded in February, 1861, the progressive elements, Fritzsche, Vahlteich, in concert with Professor Rossmassler,

Dr. Dammer and others, urged independent political activity. This led to a split, since the majority of the society opposed the agitators. A new society (the Vorwaerts) was started, from which afterwards was chosen the workingmen's committee which supported Lassalle and issued the famous "Open Letter to the Central Committee for the purpose of calling a universal German Labor Congress." This led, in April 1862, to the founding of the Universal German Workingmen's Association (allgemeine Deutsche Arbeiter-Verein), with which was born the first Social-Democratic party in Germany.

In opposition to the Universal German Workingmen's Association (allgemeine Deutsche Arbeiter-Verein), the workingmen's associations under liberal and democratic influence united in the convention of the German Workingmen's Federation (Deutsche Arbeiter-Vereine).

In both camps there was no thought of a craft organization. But the business prosperity which prevailed from 1864 to 1866 led to a series of strikes, the exceedingly disastrous result of which proved to the workingmen that besides their existing political organization, they needed another organization for their economic aspirations and struggles. Thus in 1864 a great strike broke out in the Lauenstein wagon shops, followed by strikes of the wool-workers in Burg, of instrument-makers and cabinet-makers in Hamburg and Altona, of basket-makers, tanners and turners in Hamburg, of type-setters and shoemakers in Leipzig, etc. The necessary financial support was collected in open meetings, of course in a very inadequate fashion. Moreover they led in many cases to arrests and prosecutions, since the laws prohibiting unions were then still in force. These strikes first occasioned the founding of local trade organizations in a number of German cities, as for instance, the typesetters in Leipzig.

But the first universal union, extending over all Germany, had already been formed. This was the Universal German Cigar and Tobacco Union, which Fritzsche had started in Leipzig and for which he at once got a paper of their own. But since Fritzsche himself was a prominent member of the Universal German Workingmen's Association, and the cigarmakers who formed his union were at the time the cream of the Universal German Workingmen's Association, the tendency of this first German union was decidedly Socialistic.

It was otherwise with the typesetters union, which started in 1866. This union preserved a strict neutrality in politics and a studied conservatism in regard to the general movement, which in many ways gave great offense.

The German-Austrian war of 1866 brought the labor movement to a standstill, but it was only the more active in the following years. Yet the Universal German Workingmen's Association, which reached its height in 1866, looked upon the trades union movement as a sort of brake or lightning conductor to the detriment of the political movement. There were, however, other members in the association who followed Fritzsche's example and aided the trades union movement with all their powers. Among these were Luebker of Berlin, who started the German carpenters' union in 1867, and Schob of Koeln who organized the German tailors' union.

But the majority of the association was opposed to the trades union movement. They held strictly to Lassalle's program that *only* the political movement could improve the condition of the working class. *Everything else* they looked upon as palliative measures and a division of strength. Therefore they rejected the proposal for a general convention of the Association in the summer of 1868 for the purpose of organizing strikes. On the other hand they approved the action of Fritzsche and Schweitzer, the president of the Association, who, in their capacity of members of the Reichstag, had called a universal German workingman's congress at Berlin. At this congress a Beneficial Working Class Union was formed, which, by its leadership and organization, was a dependencv of the political Universal German Workingmen's Association.

The example of Fritzsche and Schweitzer was soon followed. At the very time when they were starting the above-mentioned trades union federation, Max Hirsch and Max Dunker were founding the German trades societies (Gewerk-Vereine), which, according to their founders, were to serve as a following of the Progressist party. Moreover in the autumn of 1868, the leaders of the federation of German workmen associations in Leipzig, which meanwhile had come over to the Socialist camp, founded international trades unions which, in turn, were under the influence of the leaders of this federation. Like the different labor parties, unions of different tendencies were now at war with each other and tried to take the wind out of each other's sails.

This action of the workingmen had the result that in 1870 the capitalists formed their first dual organizations, first the tobacco and cigar manufacturers, then part of the owners of the machine shops, iron foundries and iron furnaces.

Meanwhile in the political Universal German Workingmen's Association, the antagonism against the trades unions gradually increased. At the convention of the association in 1872, Toelke pleaded for the dissolution of the Workingmen's Beneficial Society, the name taken by the Universal Workingmen's Alliance, founded in 1868, and the unions affiliated with it. This proposition was so far embodied in a resolution that an emphatic warning was given against advancing the trades union movement at the expense of the political movement.

The resolution was repeated next year at the general convention of the association in Frankfort-on-the-Main, and in 1874 at the Hanover general convention. In the latter resolution, those who continued to push the trades union movement into the foreground, in spite of the previous resolutions of the convention, were branded as traitors to the working class, because "they injured the political agitation of the Universal German Workingmen's Association in a most unjustifiable manner."

Those in a position to know, maintain that even Schweitzer, although in following Fritzsche's advice in 1868 he had helped to call the German Labor Congress, nevertheless regarded the flourishing trades unions with very mixed feelings, since he felt that they would gradually get out from under his influence.

However, in the camp of the Social-Democratic Labor party, the so-called Eisenach faction, the attitude towards the unions was entirely different. On this side was the cabinet-maker, York, the actual leader of the trades union movement. At the trades union congress in Erfurt (June 15-17, 1872) he offered the following resolution, which was unanimously adopted:

"In consideration of the fact, that the capitalist power *equally oppresses and exploits all workingmen*, no matter whether they are conservative, progressive, liberal or Social-Democrats, this congress declares it to be the sacred *duty* of the workingmen to *lay aside all party strife*, in order to create the conditions for a vigorous and successful resistance *on the neutral ground of a united trades union organization*, to secure their threatened existence and to conquer for themselves an improvemet in their class conditions."

This resolution further demanded that the different factions of the Social-Democratic labor party especially should further the trades union movement, and regretted that the Lassalle faction (the Universal German Workingmen's Association) had adopted the above mentioned hostile resolution.

It is certain that the former unfriendly sentiment of a part of the Social-Democracy against the trades unions had led the latter to believe that the party gave them insufficient support. During almost three decades, the members of the unions founded by the Social-Democracy believed it to be the *duty* of the *party* to *serve* the unions in every way. Proof of this can be found in the conventions of the Social-Democratic party held at Halle in 1890, at Berlin in 1892, at Cologne in 1893, etc.

On the other hand, the party believed that the special mission of the trades unions was to serve more or less as recruiting grounds for the Social-Democracy. Many Social-Democrats lent them their support solely on this ground. Even I myself *at first* regarded the trades unions from this standpoint.

When in 1875 the two factions of the German Social-Democracy united at Gotha—the Universal German Workingmen's Association and the Social-Democratic party founded at Eisenach in 1869—this resulted also in the unification of the trades unions on both sides. How destructive to the Socialist union movement the division in the political party had been up to this time, is shown by the conduct of Fritzsche as president of the Universal German Tobacco and Cigar-makers union. To hold his union together, he was obliged to remain strictly neutral after the organization of the Eisenach faction, although he was at heart an adherent of the Universal German Workingmen's Union (the Lassalle faction). The members of his union were divided in the two Socialist camps.

Immediately after the unity Congress in Gotha, the union leaders of the two till now divided camps held a conference, in order to bring about also a consolidation of the trades unions. Toelcke meantime had abandoned his position of hostility to the trades unions. He now presented a resolution which was accepted and which ran as follows: That although the trades union organizations are not suffi-

cient to thoroughly and permanently improve the condition of the workingmen, yet they are nevertheless adapted to temporarily raise the material condition of the latter, to further their development and bring them to a consciousness of their class condition. It was therefore declared to be the duty of the workingmen to join a trade union or to start one in case such an organization did not exist in their trade.

At this conference, it was further resolved that it is the duty of the trades union movement to keep *politics out of the trade unions*, but to join the Social-Democratic Party of Germany—the name of the now united party—since it alone could make the political and industrial position of the workers completely worthy of human existence.

Meanwhile, the persecution of the trades unions as political societies had begun, first of all in the kingdom of Saxony. There the sentencing of Liebknecht and myself in the Leipzig trial for high treason caused a very bitter feeling among the organized workingmen which found expression in mass meetings and in the labor press. The Saxon authorities replied to this by proceeding against the party and the trades unions. They looked upon the unions in different places as independent political societies and accordingly broke them up.

In the next year (1873) Bismarck tried to deal a death blow to the trades union movement. He introduced a bill in the Reichstag for the criminal punishment of contract-breaking. The Reichstag, however, rejected it.

Nevertheless he discovered in Tessendorf a tool who seemed just to correspond to his wishes. In 1874 Tessendorf had been summoned from Magdeburg, where as state's attorney he had won his spurs in the fight against Social-Democracy and had been made state's attorney in the municipal court of Berlin. Here he found kindred spirits in the members of the seventh district (a labor district).

Tessendorf, like the Saxon judges, regarded the trades unions as political societies, which had been formed contrary to the Prussian law in regard to societies. The judges of the seventh district, like the court of Chambers and the supreme court, accepted this interpretation.

Dissolutions of trades unions and confiscations of their funds now became the order of the day. The trades unions tried to escape this persecution by removing their headquarters from Berlin and other Prussian cities to places outside of Prussia. But they gained only a brief respite. Then came the Anti-Socialist law (October, 1878) and mercilessly mowed down as dangerous to the government that which had been created by a decade of hard and self-sacrificing labor.

Only the printers' union and the unions of ship-carpenters, saddlers, upholsterers and leather workers continued in existence. Also not one hair of the Hirsch-Dunker trade societies (Gewerk-Ver-eine) was touched. They were considered loyal to the government and harmless to the capitalists. The iron-clad pledge which since that time they have forced upon their members, according to which none of them can belong to the Social-Democracy, is rightly considered one of the basest means of coercing their consciences, and is worthy their capitalist leadership.

The printers' union could permanently save its life only by bowing under the Caudian yoke forced upon it by Herr Von Puttkamer, of Anti-Socialist law memory. When it tried to escape the tricks of the Leipzig police court by removing its headquarters from Leipzig to Stuttgart, Herr von Puttkamer threatened to consider it as an insurance office and subject it to the Prussian insurance law, unless it accepted the following conditions: 1st, to remove the headquarters of the union to Berlin; 2nd, not to elect politically offensive persons (that is, not to elect any Socialists) to its executive board; 3rd, that the authorities should have the right to confirm or reject the executive board. The printers' union submitted, for which, of course, it was severely censured in the circles of class-conscious workingmen.

After the fall of the Anti-Socialist law in 1890, the trades union movement, having lain low during its continuance, began anew to gain ground, although slowly. The industrial crisis, which began in the year 1890, after a short period of business activity, and lasted till 1895, was now the chief difficulty. In trades union circles the main reason for this small growth was supposed to be the indifference and even, as was claimed, the hostility of a portion of the party and their leaders. Hence the excited discussions at the above mentioned conventions in the first half of the nineties and at meetings and in the labor press.

But with the great epoch of prosperity beginning in 1895 and continuing to the present day, the situation changed. From that time, trades unions took a new impulse never known before. And thereupon the views of a portion of the trades union members changed so much that to them the trades union activity seems the alpha and omega of all labor politics, and the political activity and the party are considered secondary and subordinate.

On the other hand, this rapid rise of the trades unions was the reason why the leaders of the Catholic and Protestant workingmen's societies considered it necessary to their influence to create trades unions of their own. Thus was introduced a further division of the trades union movement, that is, of that movement which *more than any other requires for its success the unity and the solidarity of the workingmen*. But thus the question how to oppose this division and how this unity and solidarity shall be established, becomes for the trades unions still more urgent.

THE NEXT PROBLEMS OF THE TRADES UNIONS.

In order to live, the workingman is compelled to sell the only ware he has, his labor power, to the employer. He requires a wage which will satisfy his customary needs and the needs of his family, if he has one. But since the workingman sells his labor power for a definite time, he sells himself with it, figuratively speaking. Unlike every other seller of wares, he is *not free*. On the other hand, the price of his ware, like the price of every other ware, is regulated by the law of supply and demand in the branch of industry in which he seeks employment. It is the interest of the employer to keep

wages as low as possible and make labor time as long as possible. It is in the interest of the workingman to get the highest possible wages and the shortest possible labor time. The interests of the two are therefore opposed.

In fact, not high wages and long labor time, but high wages and short labor time, go hand in hand. The longer the working time in any trade, the lower are the wages, and vice versa. This is a social law, the proof of which can be given by a multitude of examples from daily life. The reason for it is this:—The shorter the average working time of the workingman, the more of a man he is, and the more of a man he is, the more he can do; and the more he can do, the more he demands.

But the individual workingman is powerless before the employer. Every attempt singlehanded to better his condition, as a rule, ends in his submission and often in his discharge from employment, unless he prefers to yield. The only way for him to better his conditions of labor, and thus the conditions of his existence, or to resist their deterioration, is union with his mates, with his fellow craftsmen. Therefore *membership in a trades union is a necessity of life for every workingman.*

The aims of the trades unions are:—The raising of wages in proportion to the condition of the labor market, the shortening of working time, abolition of overtime or higher pay for it, wherever it is unavoidably necessary, the introduction of human conditions in industry, the right of free legal defense, a traveling benefit fund, and assistance for the unemployed. The trade union fights moreover against decrease of wages and lengthening of working hours, in one word, against the deterioration of conditions of labor. It moreover strengthens the feeling of solidarity, without which no great aim can be attained. It manages the collection of necessary funds for the offensive and for the defensive and for the different benefits. It calls for strikes and boycotts when there remains no other means of obtaining its end.

The stronger the trade union is, the more thoroughly will its tasks and aims be accomplished. That is, the more fellow workers from the same craft belong to it, the more skillful will be its leadership, and the fuller its treasury. Then also its moral power is so strong, that many exactions on the workingman are dropped which otherwise would be attempted. The mere existence of the trade union is a warning to the employer not to draw the strings too tight.

Moreover, since in the factory and in the respective industry, workingmen are employed without regard to religious and political conviction, often also of different nationalities, *the trade union therefore must accept its members without respect to religious and political opinions and national descent.*

To weld together all existing fellow craftsmen into one organization must be its foremost policy, for unless this principle is followed, it cannot accomplish its mission, or will only accomplish it very imperfectly.

To this first policy for the trades unions, however, is opposed the present division of the German trades unions. Independent trades unions, Hirsch-Dunker trades societies, Christian-Catholic and Protestant workingmen's societies stand in opposition. The printers' union besides stands as a peculiar organization, in opposition to which, moreover, a part of the employers have organized a dual union of their workingmen.

These divisions are a great weakening of the trade union movement and must be counteracted—a view which is continually gaining ground in the various camps. It is only through ignorance and short-sightedness that the workingmen allow themselves to be abused, to the damage of their interest, by divisions and mutual slanders—divisions and slanders *which could never be dreamed of among the employers*. Far different is the example of the employers. This ought to open the eyes of the narrowest workingman, and in fact has already opened the eyes of many.

The class of employers, aided by the trades accident associations, to which the accident insurance laws of the German empire compelled them, have formed themselves into an organization far surpassing the workingmen's organization as to solidarity. A large part of these employers' organizations embrace the employers of their industry to the last man, which cannot be said of any workingmen's organization.

These employers' organizations have a well-paid staff of officers, a press unscrupulously subservient to their interests and means usually far surpassing those of the workingmen's organizations.

Furthermore, these employers' organizations understand how to make the best use for themselves of the power of the state and its legislation. And thus they form a power superior, as a rule, to the best workingmen's organizations.

If there was once a time when the workingmen's organizations and the feeling of solidarity among the workingmen served the employers as an example worthy of imitation, the employers on the other hand have now surpassed the workingmen. Therefore if the workingmen's organizations henceforward want to secure for themselves an authoritative influence over conditions of labor, they can do this only by unitedly and firmly resisting the employers, and by this unity and firmness winning over those of their fellow workingmen who hold aloof either through opposition or indifference or because they are undecided where to stand. Such unity and firmness are doubly necessary in view of the change which soon may come in our industrial conditions.

In this world of capitalism, a period of industrial depression follows a period of industrial prosperity. The signs are multiplying that the period of industrial prosperity, which in Germany began in 1895, has passed its zenith and that industrial depression is now beginning. With this will come hard times for the workingmen especially, for they are the *first* to feel the depression, as they are the *last* to profit by the revival of industry, and then usually through struggles, fights and privations.

But while it is comparatively easy to gain concessions in a time of business prosperity, provided the workingmen show a compact front through their organizations, *it is very hard* in time of industrial depression to keep what has been gained or to limit their wants to the lowest possible degree.

Even more than in time of industrial prosperity, the trade union in hard times is the protective weapon of the workingman. Without it he is lost and at the mercy of the employer. In such cases, unity and solidarity in the trade union are *doubly* necessary.

But to attain this solidarity, that which hitherto has separated them must be removed, and that must be put in the foreground which is common to them all—the struggle for the improvement of the material and social condition of the workingman.

*This, therefore, requires the cessation of bitter discussions about religion and party politics on both sides, and also the removal of those elements which by occupation and social position do not belong in the trade union.**

For the trade union is a special workingmen's organization. And therefore it should contain only workingmen, or those who have been workingmen and through the struggle for the cause of labor have been thrown out of work, or have been called to the front by the confidence of their fellow craftsmen.

So long as the trades unions do not understand that they mutually must make the above mentioned concessions, there will be no unity, but then they will never become what they might be. It is not to be expected, in the nature of things, that this solidarity can be brought about over night. But then in place of unity and solidarity should come at least an alliance. Every thing else, time will bring with it. Under what conditions such alliances shall be concluded, is not the problem of this treatise. These conditions the parties concerned can best decide.

FURTHER PROBLEMS OF THE TRADES UNIONS, OR POLITICS IN THE UNION.

I have pleaded that discussion of religion and party politics and similar matters shall be kept out of the unions, but this is a demand which has already been made for several decades by far-seeing union men and friends of the union. I will recall only the already quoted resolutions of the trades union congress held in Gotha in 1872 and the Gotha trades union conference in 1876. But then it was further held that the trades unionist must be advised to join the Social-Democratic party, and this advice I do not give him.

First, because if I did give this advice, any attempt at an understanding with the unions standing on the ground of other party politics would be out of the question. And secondly, because I consider this advice superfluous.

Whoever is as much convinced as I am, of the conquering strength of the Socialist ideas and their power of attraction, knows that they are gradually winning over the entire working class, even if they

* In the Hirsch-Dunker trades associations, there are many lawyers and other professional men.

are not preached and propagated in the trades union day by day.

The attitude of the government and the bourgeois parties toward the demands of labor, even when presented by non-Socialist workingmen, will take care that the logic of development follows its due course.

When South German Catholic and non-Socialist textile workers petition the Reichstag for a ten hour day, and a good Roman Catholic workingmen's society whose members vote the Centrum ticket, in Beuthen, Upper Silesia, do the same for the introduction of the eight-hour day in mines and smelting furnaces, and then only the Social-Democratic representatives support these petitions with all their might, as was done in the last session of the Reichstag, that says enough.

Besides, let us not forget that in the sphere of social reforms as elsewhere, the proverb holds good, that "appetite comes with eating." And there is no need to say which of all the political parties is resolved and in duty bound to best satisfy the appetite of the working class for reforms. Let us have some confidence in our own cause.

I therefore maintain, that *party* politics and religious discussions must be kept out of the unions. But I maintain that all the more and all the more earnestly they must carry on *workingmen's politics*, class struggle politics.

The trades union is that organization of labor which fights for the improvement of the workingmen's condition on the field of the *present* order of government and society.

What part it will play later on, under another system of society, we will not here consider.

The trade union will be true to its mission if it first fulfills the aims mentioned in the last chapter and then strives for the accomplishment of a series of demands from the government and from government legislation, for the accomplishment of which the union, as a labor organization, has not itself the power. By the laws of the German Empire, the field of accident, old age, sickness and invalid insurance, for instance, is withdrawn from the free activity of the trades unions because the state [in Germany] takes care of that.

Yet the trades unions are interested in the highest degree in the execution of these laws and are therefore bound to discuss them and formulate their wishes and demands. The same holds good for them concerning the right of forming unions and holding public meetings, the right of combination, the entire labor legislation, particularly in regard to Sunday work, a normal working day, night work, and the protection of working women and young people. Furthermore the trades unions are deeply interested in legislation on home industries, factory laws, factory inspection, the establishment of a labor board and a federal labor bureau, legislation on mining, taxes on the necessities of life, laws on commerce and taxes, the condition of the workingmen in government employ—postal and telegraph service, army workshops, railways, construction of streets and waterworks, forestry, etc.—protective legislation for agricultural laborers and the question of freedom of moving from one town to another.

In short, the trades union as a labor organization should embrace in its discussion in meetings and the press all social and industrial questions which affect the interests of any considerable number of workmen or of all workingmen. Upon these, it should take a stand.

It must be granted that this is a wide field of political activity. And the trades union is a guarantee in itself that all the above mentioned questions will be discussed only from the class standpoint of the workingman. The trades union press must discuss these subjects all the more, because there are no means of self-help which the trade union can itself adopt for changing and bettering these conditions. The state or the national government must help.

To carry on politics within the limits of these problems is therefore the *duty* of the trade union.

THE LIMITS TO THE POWER OF THE TRADE UNION.

The trade union has a great recruiting field in which it can expand. Without exhausting this field, it can number its members by millions. Yet millions remain outside it and beyond its reach, from general social causes.

In the first place, there are those industries where female labor is strongly represented or preponderates. Hitherto the attempt to bring the working women in large masses into trades union organization has failed. And it hardly can succeed.

The fact that up till now the supply of female labor is still inexhaustible, that the working woman by reason of her sex is bound to her place of residence or its immediate vicinity, that as a rule she lives in the family and her wages are looked upon only as a supplement to the family income—moreover her want of education and the probability that in a certain number of cases she will be taken out of the industrial field by marriage—all these are the main causes of this phenomenon. But if the working woman is a wife and mother—and the number of married women employed in industry increases year by year—then it is even more difficult to win her for the trades union.

The same is true of those persons employed in home industry and house work. Their number is also constantly increasing. They compete with regular shop and factory labor and exist under conditions which make the interference of organized forces absolutely indispensable. But for obvious reasons, the organization of persons employed in home industry and house work will always be very imperfect and defective and therefore powerless.

A third class of working people hard to bring into the union—and their number runs into the hundreds of thousands—are the workmen employed in governmental establishments. A beginning has already been made towards their organization. But whether it will attain sufficient strength and force to be able to decidedly resist the power of the government is very questionable, and hitherto has never been proved.

The same is true of the workingmen in those industries—and these are the most important—in which the employers have united in great protective associations in the form of syndicates, rings, and trusts, first to keep up the prices of their wares and to regulate production for this purpose, and furthermore to oppose their workmen and prescribe to them the conditions of work. The power of these employers' organizations was clearly recognized by the Webbs, who must be acknowledged as authorities in the field of trades unionism. In their book "Theory and Practice of the English Trades Unions," Vol. II, pages 92 and 93, they say:—

"When an entire industry is in the hands of one single great capitalist, or is divided between a small number of non-competing capitalists—especially if the monopoly is in any way protected against new rivals—then the trade union finds that its methods of mutual insurance and collective contract-making are as good as useless. Examples of this are the great railway companies of the United Kingdom and some of the great capitalistic trusts of the United States. Against the unlimited means, the sure monopoly of news, the absolute unity of will of this modern Leviathan—the quarter of a million of property of the richest trades union" (the pound sterling is meant, one pound equals about \$5.00) "and the clamor of one or two hundred thousand of the most obstinate and bitter workingmen are as ineffective as arrows against an armor-plated ship. * * * * When the government is the employer, the most obstinate and richest trades union can no more gain its demands than the single workingman.

What the Webbs say here of the great industrial establishments of England and the United States, is also true of Germany. Look at the great German industrial establishments of Krupp, Stumm, the "Dortmunder Union," the "Laurahütte" and the "Vulcan," etc., to say nothing of the railway and other government works, and the accuracy of their statements strikes us at once.

Professor Buecher similarly expressed himself in the proceedings of the Society for Social Politics at Vienna in 1894. He there says, "The next result of the formation of trusts is always and everywhere a great strengthening of the employers in the fight over conditions of labor. *In a trustified industry the united employers stand as one single, strong-willed individual against the workingmen.*"

And Dr. L. A. Pohle says in his work "The Trusts of Industrial Capitalists," "*As a rule, the combination of employers is just as far superior to the organization of workingmen as the individual employer is superior to the individual workingman.*"

From all this it follows, that much assistance from the trades unions is impossible for large branches of workingmen. And the agricultural laborers collectively and severally come under this head and demand attention by their great influx into the cities and industrial circles.

The condition of these workingmen can be improved only by governmental and legislative measures. And therefore to stand for these measures above all is the duty of the trades unions, because they have the advantage of independence and often also of insight over those who must be helped.

Moreover this is for the interest of the trades unions, as they must want to prevent the influx of badly paid workingmen. Whoever therefore advises the trades unions to keep out of politics, injures them most severely, for it is *quite impossible that they can attain on the basis of pure trades union activity that which they wish to attain and must attain.*

The trades union press especially must aim to exert a clear and stimulating influence on all the above-mentioned political questions. And at the same time, it must keep in sight the universal economic development, the conditions of the labor market and the world market, inventions and discoveries which are important to economic life, the social politics of governments and parliaments and factory inspection and its results.

The trades union's field of activity is therefore large and comprehensive. And if *rightly* worked, it must bear fruits which will necessarily conduce to universal economic and political progress.

THE TRADES UNIONIST AS A CITIZEN AND A PARTY MAN.

From what has been said, it follows that, although the trades union must go into *workingmen's politics*, but not necessarily *party politics*, yet for the individual member of the trades union, the hour will come when he must give due expression to his convictions in the fight of political parties. But here he acts not as a trades unionist, but as a citizen of his country.

Moreover, in city, state and national elections, the trades unionist must take a position not only on questions which especially interest him as a member of his trades union, but also on other questions demanding attention as the times call them forth, and which concern him as a member of the city and the nation. These questions are popular and higher education, the position of religious communities in state and community, taxes, traffic affairs of public welfare and public and private security, public administration, care of public health and the poor, administration of civil and penal justice, political rights of men and women as citizens in the nation, state, and city, agrarian and individual politics, commercial politics, foreign and colonial politics, army and navy affairs, etc.

The trades unionist, whether he takes part as a single voter or solicits the confidence of the voters as a candidate, now appears as a *party man*. For only in a *party* can he gain his purpose, either to see elected the man of his choice or to be elected himself.

What party he joins, is the affair of his own convictions. For the trades union has no right to question him about his political convictions, nor has it the right to prescribe to him to what party he shall belong *outside* of the trades union. If the trades unions know how to practice this degree of tolerance on both sides, their future will be satisfactory and useful.

For those who cannot yet accustom themselves to such a stand of the trades unions, I point to the *attitude of the enemies of every strong labor movement*,— according to my old rule of listening to what the enemy says. These opponents, without exception, are against my deductions. This for me is a proof that I and those who think with me are on the right road.

In conclusion, just a short reply to my critics in our own party. I have here purposely avoided going into their objections against my views. I do not wish to push an argument which can easily do more harm than good.

In my opinion, the tendency to unity and solidarity in the trades unions is irresistible, just because it results from the inherent nature of this movement. I have not spoken on my own initiative, but I was asked to state my opinion on this subject. Moreover, I am convinced that no tongue, however eloquent, and no pen, however able, can long persuade the trades unionists of different factions that what has proved to be a *great advantage* to their natural enemies, the class of the employers, is a *disadvantage* to the workingmen.

As centralization in the organization of the working class becomes a necessity against the centralizing tendencies of capitalism, so the *centralized united trades union of the workingmen* is necessary against the centralized industrial organization of the employers.

The members of the various trades unions daily must repeat to themselves this question: Why are they urged to organize in independent liberal, Catholic, and Protestant unions and unions "friendly to employers," while the employers themselves, laying aside all their differences, unite together as a solid employers' organization against the divided union organizations? And again: Why are organizations "friendly to employers" formed, like the dual organization of the printers union, while no one has ever heard of an employers' organization friendly to workmen?

Answer: Class interest preserves the employers from such harmful follies. But the deficient class interest and class-consciousness, the ignorance and narrowness of a great part of the workingmen enables false friends to lead them by the nose and divide them to the delight of their natural enemies.

Who has ears to hear, let him hear!

