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THE NEED FOR A FEDERATION
OF ALL THE WORKERS IN
The Transport Industry
By TOM MANN.

THE OUTLOOK.

SOME pessimists there are who tell us that the conditions of life are absolutely worse than in former years; that the periods of unemployment are longer than they used to be; that the power of the capitalist class is increasing every year, and that the outlook for the Workers is increasingly gloomy.

These Job's comforters point to the hopes that were raised in earlier days when the Labour movement was much younger; when champions of the working class declared that in a few years deep and far-reaching changes for the better would take place; and they ask, "what has come of it all?" What have

we gained as the result of the effort put forth? Is it not still a hand-to-mouth existence; and is not the capitalist class growing richer every month at the expense of the toilers?

It must be admitted that this is largely true; but it need not be admitted that this is the end of all things. The Workers need not and ought not to give up the struggle in despair because that struggle is lasting a longer time than some honest and earnest men thought would be the case.

For my part I am cheerfully optimistic as regards the outlook for Labour. I know that the capitalist class still dominates Society in the most impudent and arrogant fashion; I know that *The Robbery of the Poor by the Rich* is greater to-day than ever, in spite of all that has been done by Labour men and Socialists; and yet I hold that the outlook is full of glorious promise for the "Moilers and Toilers," for every section of the Workers; and that our past experiences, temporarily disappointing though they have been, have nevertheless qualified us to fight the great fight more effectively.

Further, I maintain that we are rapidly gaining in clearness of vision, and are coming to realise the full meaning of "economic determinism."

We are learning how to circumvent the capitalist system and develop our fighting forces which we know better how to use than ever before.

But to ensure this it is necessary that we should know exactly where our present weakness lies, and know also how to remedy the same. We must have no foolish pretence that progress is being made when existing facts do not warrant such a conclusion.

The Dockers.

I propose to state briefly the case for the Transport Workers, or the men engaged in the carrying trades by sea and land, but more especially the Dock, Wharf and Port Workers.

No other country in the world has such a large percentage of men connected with the carrying trade as Great Britain; and this for two reasons. First, because Britain does fully one-half of the carrying trade on the oceans of the world; and second, because our export trade is larger than that of any similar-sized population. The British ports are not on one side of the country only, but all round the islands and easily accessible at that. Hence we have an economic advantage over most other countries.

I was brought into close contact with the men in the carrying trades when, as

a Social Democrat in the years 1885-8, I did my share of propaganda work among these men, but it was not until the London Dock Strike of 1889 that I became really intimate with the conditions under which they worked and lived. And when I once grasped the full meaning of "casual" labour as experienced by scores of thousands of men in the Port of London, it gave me a revolutionary stimulus to strive with renewed vigour to do all that could be done to abolish such a system.

As the result of that strike of 1889, and the numerous struggles in the Port of London that followed immediately thereon, many changes for the better took place.

Twenty Years After.

Now that 21 years have elapsed since the strike, it is necessary to take stock of the situation and see whether the advantages obtained at that time have been maintained or lost.

As regards London it must be admitted that, whilst the number of permanent men has been slightly added to, and the wage is a little higher than prior to the '89 strike—the minimum being 6d. per hour instead of 5d.—nevertheless as regards the conditions of employment, the make-up of the gangs, the

persistent rush, corresponding to the "speed and feed" movement in engineering shops, and the taking-on of men and payment of them for as little as two hours, instead of a minimum of four hours as fixed by the conditions of settlement of the strike, in all these important matters, the conditions of the *pre-strike* days obtain at present.

One of the greatest advantages to port workers that followed upon the settlement of the great strike was the proper make-up of the gangs. There was always a tendency to work short-handed on the part of the contractors and shipowners, and frequently six men had to do the work that eight men ought to have been doing. This shorthandedness not only reduced the total wages that went to the men, but was also a danger to life and limb.

New Methods.

Since the '89 period many changes have taken place in the method of unloading vessels. In the discharge of grain in bulk, for instance, which prior to '89 in all the London docks except Millwall was done by hand; since that time the suction elevator, or else the cup elevator, have been in general use, which has added enormously to the unemployed. A very moderate statement is that two

men out of every three formerly employed in the discharge of grain are now dispensed with, *i.e.* thrown into the ranks of the unemployed. The system now resorted to is to have as few handlings of cargo as possible, and as little storage as possible. Thus at the Victoria Docks there are two flour mills. The grain is hauled in at one side of the mill from the vessel or lighter, and it goes through all the necessary processes almost without the aid of man. It is then lowered as flour from the other side of the mill into the barge ready for delivery; and every time an improved method of handling is resorted to, it means more profit for the Capitalists and more starvation for the Workmen.

In the discharge of bags of flour from a ship's hold, formerly there would be nine men in a gang in the hold, four men on each side of the boat and one man to hook on the sling. Now the pace is set so keenly that there are only three men on each side, that is, seven men instead of nine, to do the same work. This is when working under the crane. When working under the winch, less powerful than the crane, formerly they had six men in a gang, now only four, but there is the same amount of work to be done.

Again, in the discharge of American flour, twelve bags were formerly considered as much as could be handled in one sett, *i.e.* to be hoisted in one sling. Now, through improvements in the construction of the cranes, twenty bags are hoisted in one sling—fewer men, less wages, more unemployed, and larger profits for the Capitalists. To sum up, on the average there are twenty thousand employed each day in the Port of London; but there are quite 40,000 more left out. It does not mean that 20,000 get regular work. It means that it is shared in an uneven way between the 60,000, only the permanent men getting regular employment.

It should not be necessary to urge that these conditions should be altered without delay.

Ah, but How?

Then comes the question 'who is to alter them?' And to that there is only one reply: The men themselves must do it. Ah, but How? There is only one way: *viz.* by proper Industrial Organisation.

Now it is necessary to ask if the workers are properly organised.

And here one is compelled to admit that organisation is very far from being efficient.

The Dockers Union, with headquarters in London, has a membership in London and provinces of 14,000; and in the Bristol Channel ports many of the men are receiving 25 per cent. better conditions than before they were organised. But improved methods of doing the work are constantly being employed, resulting in more profits and less wages, and this is universally operative.

In the country generally, there are some twenty different Unions connected with the Transport or carrying Trades.

The Dockers Union, with headquarters at Liverpool, has also about 14,000 members, but as yet there is no real working arrangement between these two, or between these and either of the other Unions in the Transport Industry. The effects of this sectional unionism can be seen by what has just happened in the Welsh ports.

The Evils of Sectional Unionism.

The Trimmers and Tippers in these, the chief coal exporting centres, (*i.e.*, the men who tip the trucks of coal into the vessels, and the men who "trim" the coal when in the vessel to ensure proper loading), desired to have a Saturday half-holiday, leaving work at 1 o'clock. The workmen belonged to four different Unions; two with head-

quarters in London, another with headquarters in Cardiff, and another with headquarters in Swansea.

The men at Port Talbot took the initiative in this matter; they were members of the Dockers Union of London. As a result, a Conference was held of the officials of the four Unions in the district, *i.e.*, in addition to the Union named, there were also the Coal Trimmers Union of Cardiff, Penarth and Barry, the National Amalgamated Labourers Union (Swansea), and the Amalgated Society of Railway Servants, to which Union a number of the Tippers belonged.

I propose giving a few details in connection with this matter, because it serves well to illustrate the impossibility of effective action with the multiplicity of Unions, working each independent of the other; and in doing so I have one object only, and that is to bring to a head what I am sure is the desire of all the better men in each of these Unions, *viz.*, the unifying of these respective organisations so that they shall become powerful for good, instead of being powerless as they are at present.

The ports where the men desired to get the Saturday half-holiday were Cardiff, Barry, Penarth, Swansea, Port Talbot and Newport.

Now to show the complexity of the situation :

In Cardiff, the Trimmers belong to the Coal Trimmers Union, but the Tippers belong to the A.S.R.S. In Newport, the Trimmers and Tippers belong to the Dockers Union. In Barry, the Trimmers belong to the C.T.U., but the Tippers belong to the A.S.R.S. In Port Talbot, the Trimmers and Tippers belong to the Dockers Union. In Penarth, the Trimmers belong to the C.T.U., but the Tippers belong to the A.S.R.S. In Swansea, the Trimmers and Tippers belong to the N.A.U.

Several Conferences were held between the delegates of these respective Unions, and it was agreed that notices should be given in as a preliminary to action to obtain the Saturday half-holiday. Then it transpired that one of the Unions was not prepared to give in notices. Another Conference was held and then it was found that another of the Unions was not prepared to take any action beyond informing the Ship-owners and Brokers they would like to have the half-holiday; by which time the owners on their side, knowing perfectly well the sectional nature of the men's organisations, rode the high horse and declared that such a claim as that

put forth for Coal Trimmers and Tippers to finish the week on Saturdays at 1 o'clock could not be entertained. If vessels needed coals the men must work till 5 o'clock, and if it was a case of getting the boat out by next tide, they must work till 8 o'clock on a Saturday; and so the matter is supposed to be settled.

This has just happened ; the Owners had no reason to advance other than that the corresponding men in the North of England, at Hull, Shields, etc., worked these hours, and, therefore, they must continue so to work in Bristol Channel ports.

**Unified Action is :: ::
Absolutely Imperative.**

Now the Saturday half-day has been established over 40 years in many occupations, and there is no reason why men connected with coal loading should not have this condition as well as others. Ships are loaded now in half the time they were a few years ago, and there is no reason why Saturday afternoon should be worked any more than Sunday, and if the vessels could be loaded in half the time they now take, from the owners' standpoint there would never arrive a time when what the men ask for could be granted.

Any one can see exactly why the men are compelled to submit to the dictation of the "bosses." It is owing entirely to the numerous Unions and their inability to work together..

To allow this sectionalism to continue any longer, will be a scandal to all concerned.

Not only for some of the ports, but for all the men in all the ports, a common policy must obtain, and the man who deliberately encourages sectional Unions any longer can only be looked upon as being indifferent to the general well-being, and, therefore, an enemy of the workers.

Prospects for Speedy Action

It is not necessary to dwell at greater length upon the necessity for unity. It is self-evident to every thoughtful person, and I, for one, am exceedingly pleased to learn that the Executive of the Dockers Union at their last meeting in London, a fortnight ago, authorised the following circular to be sent to each of the Unions connected with the Transport Industry.

PROPOSAL *re* THE NATIONAL FEDERATION OF TRANSPORT WORKERS.

Dear Sir and Brother,

The conditions of port workers in the United Kingdom, in common with all other

workers, leave very much to be desired; whilst it is true that in some ports sections of the men have obtained and still maintain better conditions than formerly prevailed, it is well known that the conditions generally prevailing are most unsatisfactory.

In common with others, we of the Dockers Union desire to do all that is possible to bring about changes for the better; and we are glad to know that other Unions are wishful to be at the work also.

Having had a lengthy experience, we know full well that before any change, any real change, can be made, a far better understanding must exist between the various Unions in the Transport trades.

We are of opinion that there is urgent need for a genuine federation of all Unions connected with the carrying trades, and that this should be attempted without delay. The Executive of the Dockers Union, therefore, respectfully make this overture to each of the other Unions in the Transport Industry, and ask:

(1) Will your organisation take part in a Conference having in view the unifying of the Transport Workers' organisations in a genuine Federation, for the purpose of taking such action as may be necessary for improving the standard of the workers in the Transport Industry, and to enable us to ally ourselves with all other industrial organisations for fighting purposes?

(2) If you agree with the desirability of such action, will you please reply to this as early as possible, and make what suggestions you can as to the method of convening such Conference, and suggesting where it should be held?

Yours sincerely,

BEN TILLET.

If this effort should result in a real uniting of the various organisations, it may prove to be epoch-making in its results.

The following organisations have received the above invitation :

Carmens Trade Union, London.
Secretary—Councillor S. March,
9 Upper North Street, Poplar, E.

Coal Trimmers Union,
Secretary—S. Fisher,
39 Mount Stuart Square, Cardiff.

National Union of Dock Labourers,
Secretary—J. Sexton,
46 Hanover Street, Liverpool.

Gasworkers and General Labourers Union,
Secretary—W. Thorne, M.P.,
172 Pentonville Road, London.

National Amalgamated Union of Labour,
Secretary—J. N. Bell, J.P.,
4 Higham Place, Newcastle.

Labour Protection League,
Secretary—A. Harris,
96 Neptune Street, Rotherhithe.

Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants
Secretary— . Thomas, M.P.,
72 Acton St., Grays Inn Rd., W.C.

National Sailors and Firemen's Union,
Secretary—Ed. Cathery,
Maritime Hall, W.I. Dock, E.

Amalgamated Stevedores,
Secretary—J. Anderson,
Maritime Hall, Poplar, E.

Amalgamated Watermen and Lightermen,
Secretary—H. Gosling, L.C.C.,
29 Trinity Sq., Tower Hill, E.C.

General Amalgamated Labourers Union.
Secretary—J. Twomey,
1 St. David's Place, Swansea.

British Labour Amalgamation,
Secretary—Tom Fox,
5 Repton Street, Manchester.

Engine Drivers and Crane Drivers,
Secretary—Geo. Grisley,
Barking Road, Canning Town, E.

National Union of Ships' Stewards, Cooks,
Butchers, and Bakers,
Secretary—Frank Pearce,
6 Spekeland Buildings,
22 Canning Place, Liverpool.

I do not think there can be any room for doubt but that, if the dozen men whose names are given as Secretaries of the Unions enumerated, were to put their heads together and show, for the Federation, that amount of enlightened zeal that each has already displayed when fighting for his particular Union, there would soon be vast changes in the condition of the Transport Workers.

Sailors and Firemen.

In this connection it is fitting to direct attention to the special organising campaign now being conducted by the Sailors and Firemen's Union. Every one will wish them the best of success,

but it is not possible for them to be really successful without the genuine co-operation and backing of the Port Workers; or, putting aside that consideration, if the energetic agitation that Mr. Havelock Wilson and his colleagues are conducting should result in upsetting the trade of one or several of the principal Ports, we cannot hope for solidarity unless steps have been taken to ensure it.

That the position of the Sailors and Firemen demands urgent attention none will dispute. The humiliating conditions imposed by the Shipping Federation are well known. Not only do they arrogate to themselves the right to sign on men on terms that suit their special interests, but they insist also on a medical examination of a kind fit for animals. In Antwerp *they literally brand each man* on the wrist with a rubber stamp, as evidence that he is theirs, a brand with the initials of this Ship-owners' Federation, now become a Slave-owners' Federation. It must be realised that they are only awaiting an opportunity to introduce their enlightened and highly civilised methods here.

It is surely high time we learned how to organise as a class, and develop the courage to fight as a class.

Shipping Federation :: Powerless in one week!

At a recent meeting of the London Trades Council I opened a discussion on Industrial Unionism, and a delegate, criticising my position, said the reason of Transport Workers not being more powerful was not because of Sectional Unionism, as I had said, but "because of the large numbers of unemployed ever available at the service of Shipowners, Dock Directors, etc." I reply by saying that, great as is the number of unemployed, if concerted action were possible with the whole of the Port Workers, even supposing the other Trades rendered no assistance, the Shipping Federation would be powerless in one week.

Moreover, a good 25 per cent. of the work directly connected with the Transport Industry requires specially trained men, and united action with all Seagoing men, including, of course, the Engineers, would render powerless a hundred Shipping Federations.

Working Class All Powerful! ::

Good Trade Unionists and Socialists do not give themselves the opportunity of realising the all-powerful character of Working Class Solidarity. It is

absolutely *all-powerful*. The power of the Capitalists to lock out men from the means of life has very marked limitations; given actual Working Class Solidarity the *locking-out would be done by the workers*, and *the Locking-up too if need be*.

I am not disposed to quarrel with any who fail to take my view of the situation, and I am not in the least disposed to say this or that one will sell the movement; I think I can make adequate philosophic allowance for environments; but I claim the right to express an opinion and to draw conclusions, and to be guided by a knowledge of events as to what is lacking in the Labour and Socialist Movement in this country, and I can see quite plainly that much of the virility that characterised the Movement fourteen or fifteen years ago is absent at the present time. There is an air of terrible fearsomeness come over many of the old-time fighters; there is a disposition on all hands to talk of the barbarous methods of the Strike; as though anything was ever worse since the world began than the dying by inches, every week until death takes them, of thousands of the ill-fed in London! Under barbarism, nothing so vile, so foreign to refined feeling, so utterly hateful, ever existed; and what is more,

under barbarism when anything approximating to such a condition of things shewed itself, the more primitive barbarians exhibited a healthy spirit of revolt, and made short work of the oppressors.

A Spineless Multitude.

As we now have the situation, one section has such an absurd respect for Parliamentary methods of procedure, with all the smug conventinoidity that this carries with it; and another section is so tied up with regard to legal and constitutional methods, even as applied to the efforts of the Unions, that the workers are becoming a supine and spineless multitude, never daring to give themselves the glorious experience of a genuine battle with the workers' enemies. But this stage cannot be permanent; we are not so utterly hypnotised by the artful plutocracy but that we shall ere long become truly class—conscious and bold enough to dare to do a little fighting in our own day, and not pass it all on to our children.

The Hand of Fellowship.

In London there is now a *Port of London Authority* administering the Docks, etc., which has taken the place of the various Dock Companies. They

employ many men, but not by any means all in the Port ; but a sensible step has been taken by the men who have formed a Council of their own, composed of each of the Unions, and these have already classified the men into over forty occupations. It is intended to approach the Port Authority in organised fashion; and those responsible have wisely decided first to conduct an organising campaign among all sections and so fill up some of the ugly gaps that at present exist. This is an excellent step, and as some of the Union and non-Union men of the Port may read these lines, I desire to say a few words to the non-members.

I have no time to spend in blaming these men. I extend the hand of fellowship and offer words of encouragement and brotherly welcome to come into the Union again. By Unionism alone is there any real hope for any material improvement. We have tasted of the fruits of Unionism in the past and they have been distinctly good, but we have never yet been really organised under normal conditions. The Union is the workers machine to achieve great and good work. The Union stands between the worker and a "boss" to guard the worker against arrogance and insult. The Union is the place for fellow

workers to fraternise; the real educational institution where information should be forthcoming about the World's Movements of Workers, all struggling for economic emancipation.

The Union is conducive to good-fellowship. It should and will explain the "Class War" and the stages of progress made in that war. It lifts the Worker out of the mere routine of working for bread, and tends to brighten and broaden his views of life. Comrades; get into the Union according to your occupation. Don't receive advantages for which other men fight without doing a share yourself. Join and attend well, and do a share of work, and get others to join, and get and keep your eyes on the goal, the true goal of working class emancipation, the wiping out of the capitalist system of Society and the ushering in of a worthier and happier time. Line up then inside the Unions; whatever is wrong we can put right, far better inside than outside. Don't forget in all the blackness of despair that may have been your lot through being out-of-work, through ill health or what not, that there are men and brothers who love you and are willing and anxious to work with you and for you, and therefore wish to help in raising the standard of life shared by your wife

and children ; and you will find a real pleasure in being identified with your comrades striving after the same ideal.

Time was when the Dockers of Hull could give an excellent account of themselves, and I believe ere long we shall find Hull well organised once more and taking its rightful position in the great class struggle.

The Next Step :: Towards Triumph.

During the past month I have addressed many meetings, and at each of them I have advocated Industrial Unionism. At most of them I have taken a vote as to whether the audience agrees therewith, and in every instance practically all present have voted in the affirmative.

Those who have not read a sufficiently exhaustive explanation of Industrial Unionism should get last month's "Industrial Syndicalist"; we had a large number printed as it was likely to be in demand, and they have nearly all gone. Those able and willing to help might do worse than getting supplies of the present and the remaining copies of the last one and sell or give them as may be convenient.

Industrial Unionism is in the ascendancy and no power can stop it. It is the next step in advance, making ultimate triumph possible. In last issue I expressed the hope that the General Federation of Trades Unions would see the wisdom of taking up the

work of unifying the Unionist Movement. I still hope so, though no sign was given by them at their recent Conference at Swansea that they had any conception of what is wrong with the Movement to-day. This, however, will right itself in good time, and that good time must not be a long time.

Our Comrades abroad Set the Pace. :: :: ::

In Germany, they have been organising for years and trying to unite all the carrying trade organisations in one national body; they have now just succeeded in it and they number 140,000. What an example to us in this country with all our port workers and sea-going men.

Our French comrades are travelling rapidly, I much wish we had space for a few notes on their activities. A little later on we hope to be able to do so.

Italian Syndicalists too, in various parts of Italy, are making splendid progress, and in some respects are setting the pace in economic organisation.

In America, also, the Industrial Unionists are exhibiting splendid vigour, accomplishing great things by their method. Comrade Eugene Debs is an ardent advocate of Industrial Unionism and holds it to be vitally essential that economic organisation should receive the fullest attention; by its aid, political action may be made valuable; without it, no real advance is possible.

The *International Transport Workers Federation* has its head-quarters in Berlin.

But what we stand in most urgent need of here in Britain, is a *National Federation of all the Transport Workers organisations* including, of course, the Sailors and Firemen, and on the lines of the German Federation.

This national body, when formed, will of course federate with *The International*.

Unfortunately, there is a tendency, for some people, to become so eminently respectable as to lose all fighting virility; there can however, be no salvation without fighting; therefore, the order is: *Prepare to Fight, and Fight.*


I earnestly appeal to all fellow Unionists to lose no time in doing whatever is possible to bring about so desirable a consumation.

Meanwhile comrades of Britain, let us put our own house in order, and bring about a

**National Federation of
Transport Workers.**

NOTE.—Each number of this series of pamphlets deals with a separate subject which is of permanent interest to the workers and will, therefore, remain on sale after the month of publication.

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