The Railroaders' Next Step

Written: William Z. Foster
First Published: The Labor Herald Publishing Company 1921
Source: The Labor Herald Pamphlets No. 1 by The Trade Union Educational League

CHAPTER I

The Thieving Railroads

The supreme need of railroad men at the present time is a consolidation of our many labor organizations into one compact body. The power of the companies has become so enormous, their solidarity so intense, and their greed so voracious, that the prevailing type of federated craft unionism is no longer able to cope with the situation. If we are to maintain existing labor conditions, not to speak of making further advances, we must arrive at a more solidified form of organization. The tremendous latent power of the great army of railroad workers will have to be fully developed. This can be done successfully only by the amalgamation of the sixteen principal railroad craft unions into one industrial union covering every branch of the railroad service.

As I write this (March, 1921) events are taking shape that render more pressing than ever the need for the utmost possible power and solidarity on the part of all railroad workers. The companies are now making a great drive to crush the unions and to force us down to serfdom. Some time ago they secured the passage of the infamous Esch-Cummins law limiting the right of railroad men to strike; just recently they slipped through the United States Senate the Poindexter bill, abolishing this right altogether and providing fines of from $500 to $10,000 and imprisonment not to exceed ten years for those who even "solicit, advise, induce or persuade, or attempt to induce or persuade," railroad workers to quit their jobs; and now they are before the Railroad Labor Board demanding the abolition of the national agreements, reductions in wages, lengthening of the workday, reinstatement of piecework and a general return to pre-war slavery. Considering their high-handed methods it will be strange indeed if the situation does not wind up in a terrific strike. For this threatening struggle railroad men should be prepared with the strongest, closest-knit organization possible.

This anti-union campaign is, of course, calculated to reduce railroad workers to utter helplessness so that we may be ruthlessly exploited by the railroad owners. The latter are in business solely for profit. In their greed to make money they consider all means legitimate. They are the biggest single gang of thieves in the world. Humanity and fair play cut no figure with them. So long as their own profits are forthcoming they care not a rap for the sufferings of their workers. That is why they have so bitterly fought every working improvement in the railroad industry; collective bargaining, better wages, shorter hours, the sixteen-hour law, the safety appliance laws, etc. Because it paid them well, they were entirely

content to have their workers exhausted by from 25 to 60-hour runs, abused like dogs by tyrannical foremen, pauperized by low wages, destroyed by piecework systems, crushed to death by faulty equipment, etc., etc. The only protection the workers have had from the most savage exploitation, the sole thing that has kept us from sinking into complete degradation is our trade unions. These organizations have achieved results entirely upon the basis of the amount of power they have been able to exert. The railroad owners can appreciate no other argument than that of might.

Plundering the Public Domain

In order that railroad workers may clearly understand what powerful and unscrupulous crooks our opponents, the companies, are and so that we may be aroused to thought and action, I will cite some of the exploits of the transportation magnates. [All railroad workers should read Gustavus Myers' "History of the Great American Fortunes," and C. E. Russell's "Stories of the Great Railroads." Both are fall of well-authenticated accounts of the amazing robberies committed upon the American people by the railroad companies. Many of the incidents cited in this chapter are taken from their pages. The books are procurable from Chas. H. Kerr & Co., Chicago.]

From its very inception railroading in this country has been marked by brazen thievery. Every means that human ingenuity could devise has been used without stint or limit to prostitute the nation's transportation system to the benefit of a few social parasites. Merciless exploitation of the workers, land-grabbing, stock-watering, rebating, bribing of legislators and judges, embezzlement, perjury—these are some of the criminal

methods habitually resorted to in building up the present ownership of the giant railroads. The man who could figure out some new scheme to rob the people was hailed as a great inventor by the railroad crooks, and his fortune was made. The cleverest thief has always been the most successful railroad magnate.

A rich source of plunder for the railroad owners was the Government land. They literally stole an empire of it. Their usual method was to have corrupt lobbyists push bills through the National and State legislatures giving them vast grants of land for building the railroads. Thus the Northern Pacific got 47,000,000 acres, the Southern Pacific 18,000,000, the Union Pacific 22,600,000, and others accordingly, until 160,000,000 acres in all of the people's heritage had been stolen. This enormous stretch of land is equal in extent to the states of Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Ohio and Indiana. It fell into the maw of the railroad thieves.

Most of this is rich farming, mineral and timber land. It is now worth billions of dollars. One unacquainted with the greed of the railroad companies might think that they would have been satisfied with this gigantic steal. But not they; they are money mad; they want the whole country. It happened that some of their land grants included desert land; so, in the guise of helping poor settlers, they had a law passed allowing anyone who had received government desert land to exchange it for government farming land. Then they hastily dumped in 50,000,000 acres of desert land and took in exchange, not farming land, but 50,000,000 acres of Northwest timber land, the finest on the globe. This was a typical railroad fraud.

Besides the land grants, the Government (inspired to action by big campaigns of open bribery) gave the early railroad builders large money subsidies. These were a fruitful source of loot. For example, the men behind the corrupt Central Pacific got in land and other subsidies $86,000,000 wherewith to build their road. The total cost of building, including the greatest extravagance and graft, was $42,000,000. The remaining $44,000,000 of the Government gift they calmly pocketed. Thus the Government paid for the road twice over and still it belonged to Huntington and his fellow-crooks. These gentlemen, whose descendants are highly honored citizens, started out in 1861 with a capital of $108,987. Twenty-three years later they had succeeded in stealing 5906 miles of railroad capitalized at $454,000,000, not to mention other properties. Up till the present time this project has yielded its owners $700,000,000—that is to say, the grafters have been paid enough to build their roads seven times over and still they own them completely.

Robbing One Another

It would be wrong, however, to leave the impression that the railroad magnates have confined their efforts to exploiting Labor and defrauding the Government. That would be to misrepresent their nefarious business ethics. Their policy is to grab everything in sight that is not nailed down, no matter whom it may belong to. They are impartial in the matter. They rob each other as freely as they do outsiders. A time-honored device to do this is for the controlling clique in a company to milk the rest of the stockholders (and thus the people at large) by setting up an outside company, owned by themselves, to do construction and repair work for the parent railroad and then voting it contracts at fabulous prices. Thus the

grafters have sucked in millions and millions of dollars in ill-gotten gains, and thus many a railroad has been bled white, thrown into a receiver's hands and left for the people to re-finance. We see the same policy in operation at the present time, with the railroads letting out immense quantities of work to "independent" equipment companies while their own shops and workers stand idle.

Bitter, dog-eat-dog wars have raged between rival interests for many years over the control of the railroads. In these brutal encounters the law of fang and claw prevail. Everything from petty larceny to murder is considered legitimate. The struggle for the Erie was typical: Originally this road was built by public subscription, but as usual a bunch of thieves got title to it. They sucked it dry with the customary methods, and finally lost it to one Daniel Drew by a mortgage foreclosure. Drew used the road for speculative purposes, making millions. But the greedy Vanderbilt, whom Gustavus Myers calls "the foremost blackmailer of his time, the plunderer of the National Treasury in the Civil War, the arch-briber and corruptionist," outwitted him, ruined him and seized the road. He made the mistake, however, of putting Drew, Jay Gould and Jim Fisk in charge of it. These worthies promptly double-crossed him and, by an illegal issue of stock, got control. Vanderbilt's crooked judge thereupon issued an order against them. But they fled his jurisdiction with $7,000,000 in cash, the proceeds of their robbery. Later on Gould and Fisk bribed the New York Legislature for $500,000 to make their stock issue legal. This left them masters of the situation. Then, freed from the threat of jail, they turned on their partner, Drew, and bankrupted him. Some time afterward Fisk was shot, and finally Gould was ousted by an English syndicate that, copying

Gould's methods, spent $750,000 in bribery to do the job. Eventually the road fell into the grip of the great railroad octopus, Morgan & Co., and there it still remains. For these jungle fights, which raged everywhere, of course the workers had to pay the bill.

When the workers demand a few cents more per hour in wages the railroad companies always raise a howl about the dire things that will happen to the widow and orphan stockholders. But in their own brutal struggles for financial mastery they show no mercy to these elements. The robbery of the widow Colton was a case in point: Colonel Colton, her husband, was one of the four men who engineered the notorious Central Pacific land-grabbing, stock-jobbing steals for many years. It might have been thought that when he died his three partners in guilt would have shown his widow some consideration. But the principles of humanity never trouble railroad magnates. True to their kind, and like a pack of wolves rending one of their number that has fallen, the three remaining partners stole almost the last cent Mrs. Colton had. To do this they had to bribe her confidential adviser, her lawyer and a judge. But such matters are only details in the day's work of railroad owners.

A Sea of Watered Stock

A favorite thieving device is the watering of railroad company stocks. Every worker should know how this chicanery is operated. Let us explain it briefly: Suppose, for instance, a certain railroad is capitalized at $100,000,000. To water its stock the controlling capitalists, on the pretext of improving the property, issue, say, another $100,000,000 of stock. Thus the burden of the industry is doubled. Thereafter it has to

pay dividends upon $200,000,000 instead of $100,000,000. The advantages to the crooks engineering the hocus-pocus are many. For one thing they are enabled to steal scores of millions at a blow; and another is that the resultant cutting of the dividend rate (which in the case cited would be 50 per cent) puts the road in the position of being poverty-stricken and furnishes an excellent excuse for beating down wages and screwing up passenger and freight rates. When, however, through wage-cutting, rate-raising and the natural increase in business, the dividend rate rises on the watered stock, then the crooks inject more water and the whole process is gone over again.

By means of this watered stock swindle every railroad system in the United States has been used as an instrument of extortion and robbery. Dozens of railroads have had their equipment ruined and themselves thrown into bankruptcy because of it. At a hearing a few years ago in connection with the financial wrecking of the Rock Island it was found that the Moore & Reid interests had poured $350,000,000 of watered stock into the original capitalization of $75,000,000, It was more than the road could stand and it went under. In 1907, according to C. E. Russell, of the $409,946,845 capitalization of the New York Central, at the very least $175,000,000 was nothing but water. By watered stock and other crooked schemes the infamous Credit Mobilier gang ruined the Union Pacific. Then, when everyone thought it had been bled to death, Russell Sage and Jay Gould came along and stole another $100,000,000 from it. Later, Standard Oil, operating through Harriman, got the road and is now exploiting it more vigorously than ever. Up to 1908 the Great Northern clique, grace to their various land-grabbings and stock-waterings, had taken in profits from that rich

property and had values in sight to the enormous amount of $1,526,016,521. Investigating the New York, New Haven & Hartford, which had collapsed financially, the Interstate Commerce Commission found that the bandits owning that concern had increased its capital stock 1500 per cent in eight years, and had pocketed almost all of the money.

The general result of this stock-watering, continued over many years, has been to enormously over-capitalize the railroad industry. Many experts declare that all the railroads in the United States could be replaced for ten billion dollars. But the companies have them capitalized at nineteen billion, and insist upon returns on that basis. And the powers-that-be are quick to recognize their claims. The Interstate Commerce Commission is always very obliging in the matter of rates. And the Government does what it can, too. The infamous Esch-Cummins law, which Senator LaFollette fittingly characterized as marking "the unconditional surrender of Congress to Wall Street;" guaranteed the railroads a return of at least 5% per cent on their swollen capitalization during its term. Under its provisions the railroads were paid on the basis of $940,000,000 per year, or at the rate of enough to rebuild all of them in ten years. Such a price are we compelled to pay for being dominated and abused by our railroad autocracy.

To share in the great loot from the railroads there were officially listed on December 31st, 1918, 647,689 stockholders. But many of this number are duplications, because although one individual may hold stock in numerous companies he is counted separately for each holding. It is extremely doubtful if the total number of railroad stockholders will run over 100,000. And the great majority of these are small fry, owning only a share

or two apiece. It has been estimated that one per cent of all the stockholders own over 50 per cent of all the stock. It is to support in luxury this minority of parasites that the vast army of 1,850,000 railroad workers keep the 235,000 miles of railroads in operation for beggarly wages and under the most unfavorable working conditions.

The Big Fish Eat the Little Ones

The foregoing examples of orthodox railroad methods will suffice to indicate the moral caliber of the unprincipled lot who have managed to steal their way into ownership of our transportation systems. Now, let us glance for a few moments at the way in which they are concentrating and consolidating their forces, in order to exploit Labor the better.

The pioneer railroad capitalists were men of comparatively small means. In the early days hundreds of small companies sprang up, each operating a little stretch of railroad, furnishing transportation to a limited district. But soon a strong current towards combination set in. Gradually the stronger financial groups absorbed the weaker ones (mostly by chicanery and fraud) and linked their many little “jerk-water” roads together, eventually building up the gigantic railroad systems of today.

The history of the New York Central is typical: Originally between New York and Buffalo, the present main line of the New York Central, there were sixteen separate railroads, each owned and operated by a distinct company. But the notorious Vanderbilt—he who gave expression to the two working principles of capitalistic railroading; namely, “All the traffic will

bear," and "The public be damned"—grabbed control of all these petty roads and jammed them into one. Then he reached out and seized, one after the other, a whole series of big railroad systems, including the Lake Shore & Michigan Southern, Michigan Central, Big Four, Pittsburgh & Lake Erie, Boston & Albany, Erie, etc., each of which in turn had been built up of many small roads. Besides this, the growing octopus secured strong hold of such roads as the Delaware & Hudson; Delaware, Lackawanna & Western; Philadelphia & Reading; New York, Ontario & Western; Lehigh Valley, etc., and large numbers of trolley lines, coal mines, industrial plants, express and telegraph companies, etc., etc. It is an industrial Colossus.

Another case in point is that of the great New York, New Haven & Hartford system, controlled by the Morgan interests: Like the New York Central, this company built itself up from a lot of smaller ones, until, at last, it had secured a stranglehold on the entire railroad transportation system of New England. Then it proceeded to secure an almost complete monopoly of water traffic in its territory by absorbing the Fall River Line, Stonington Line, New Bedford Line, New Haven Line, Maine Steamship Company, Bridgeport Line, Hartford Line, Rock Island Line, and many so-called independent steamship companies. And, finally, it sought to do the same thing with the trolley lines. By means of flagrant legislative corruption it secured control of the entire electric transportation systems of Connecticut, Rhode Island and Massachusetts. Thus, in transportation of all sorts, the New York, New Haven & Hartford was dictator for the several states in which it operated.

The titanic Pennsylvania Lines were similarly brought about by the assimilation of small roads and affiliated industries. It is now accredited with 21,389 miles of trackage, the ownership of 72 subsidiary railroad companies and heavy interests in 254 related industries. Normally it employs about 275,000 workers.

The tendency towards consolidation shown in the three big systems cited above manifests itself in all sections of the railroad industry. Already the whole business has resolved itself into a few financial groups. In 1916 the World Almanac (page 216) listed these groups as follows:

Name	Mileage	Stocks	Bonds
Vanderbilt	26,126	$628,924,000	$765,441,600
Pennsylvania	21,389	779,916,000	576,600,000
Harriman	22,716	756,600,000	1,098,775,400
Hill	14,183	417,527,000	432,812,000
Morgan	14,117	573,619,000	545,118,000
Gould	22,318	541,220,000	822,613,000
Moore-Reid	29,173	372,906,000	490,209,000
Rockefellers	18,119	259,116,000	319,204,000
Walters	11,914	150,116,000	204,119,000
Erb Syndicate	13,104	345,100,000	524,146,000
Independent	34,069	653,108,000	486,113,000
Total	227,228	$5,478,152,000	$6,265,151,000

Since this table was compiled many changes haven taken place in railroad ownership. The monopolization of the industry has proceeded apace. A close study now demonstrates (The New Majority, Chicago, March 5th,

1921) that financial control of the systems as a whole has simmered down practically to four great, closely-related, interlocked capitalistic interests; viz., Morgan & Co., The National City Bank (Rockefeller group), The First National Bank of New York (Baker group) and Kuhn, Loeb & Co. It is said that Morgan & Co. alone control 300 railroad directorships, besides owning 54 "independent" railroad equipment and construction plants and innumerable other enterprises.

The time is close at hand—if it has not already arrived unbeknown to us—when our entire transportation system will be ruled by a single financial interest. And at its head, backed by the nineteen billions of railroad capital and untold billions from other industries, will stand some super-Gary, the industrial emperor of America.

Workers Versus Exploiters

This tremendous consolidation and combination of the enemy's forces is of vital importance to railroad labor. In years gone by there was real competition on the railroads. Between the many independent companies rate wars raged. Often in these struggles passenger and freight schedules were slashed to the bone. In one memorable case a transcontinental railroad reduced its passenger fare from Chicago to California to $1.00. Whereupon its rival retaliated not only by cutting its rate to $1.00 likewise, but also by furnishing free meals to its patrons en route.

Naturally, such unorganized, competitive conditions played into the hands of Organized Labor and made its fight easier. If the unions tied up a road the other roads usually left it to its fate. They seldom gave it any

practical assistance, instead they grabbed what they could of its business. The consequence was that the companies were reluctant to enter into strikes, and comparatively more eager to settle them when they did occur.

But now things are altogether different. This is the era of railroad monopoly. Competition has been almost entirely eliminated. On the employers' side the railroad industry is practically united into one country-wide organism. National ownership has been concentrated into the hands of a few magnates, keenly conscious of their mutual interests; the national rate-making power is wielded by the tractable (to the companies) Interstate Commerce Commission-rate wars are now merely a matter of history; the national administration of labor matters is looked after by the Association of Railway Executives; and the national technical problems are handled by the American Railroad Association. [The American Railroad Association is a recent amalgamation of the American Railway Master Mechanics' Association; Association of Railway Telegraph Superintendents; Association of Transportation and Car Accounting Offices; Freight Claim Association; Master Car Builders' Association; Railway Signal Association; Railway Storehouse Keepers' Association, etc. It is divided into five departments: Operating, Engineering, Mechanical Traffic, Transportation. If the need arose it would prove an efficient strikebreaking agency.]

Everywhere is system, organization, standardization. And now it is proposed in powerful railroad circles to secure legislation fusing all the railroads into one gigantic system of ownership and operation. This is the

logical outcome of the ceaseless tendency towards combination.

Now the effect of all this consolidation and interlocking of company interests is to make railroad Labor's fight much more severe. Today when the unions enter into battle with one company they have them all to fight. No more do other roads abandon one that has a fight on its hands, or try to take advantage of its crippled condition. Far from it; now they rush to its support, furnishing it with financial backing, re-routing its traffic over their lines, lending it locomotives and cars, etc. Thus, through co-operation with one another, the resisting power of all the companies is enormously increased.

This is a situation which the railroad unions, on pain of extinction, must meet effectively. And they can do so only by the complete elimination of the competitive principle from their own ranks. Faced by a united opposition we railroad men cannot afford to have sectionalism, such as now exists, in our forces. We must not allow one part of our organization to be played off against the rest. We must present an unbroken front to the enemy. The railroad union situation must be brought to a uniform, national proposition. To do this it is necessary to amalgamate the sixteen railroad craft unions into one industrial union.

Now let us see to what extent in their long years of experience with unionism, the railroad workers have understood the need for closer affiliation, what has been done about it, and how the next step should be taken.

CHAPTER II

The Failure of Dual Unionism

Faced by the growing power and limitless greed of the railroad companies, railroad workers have for many years sensed more and more clear the need for a greater solidarity among themselves. In the main they may be said to have responded to this need in two general ways: First, the radical minorities, consciously weighing the factors at hand and looking a long way ahead, have advocated the founding of an industrial union to take in all railroad men. And, with characteristic impatience, they have asserted that this could best be done by discarding the old trade unions altogether and starting afresh with a new, theoretically perfect organization. Second, the conservative masses, more or less blindly and without plan, have reacted to the pressure of the companies by joining together their many old unions, thus gradually forming them into ever-more extensive combinations as fast as the need for such becomes apparent. They are working unconsciously towards industrial unionism, but by an entirely different route than that of the radical minorities.

This question of solidarity is one of paramount importance to railroaders. But there is an appalling confusion and lack of knowledge about the whole matter. The radicals have a blind and unwarranted faith in their dual industrial union program, and both radicals and conservatives alike are in ignorance of the true significance of the evolution towards greater solidarity constantly taking place in the old trade unions. Hence, perhaps it will pay us to go into the subject in detail, to examine both the radicals' conscious striving for industrial unionism and the conservatives' unconscious drift in the same general direction. Let us first consider the radical program:

Knights of Labor and American Railway Union

The railroad craft unions were still in their infancy when the radical minorities began to set afloat their all-inclusive dual industrial unions. And the radicals have stuck to this separatist policy for over a generation, up till the present day. During this period they have launched many such unions, all of which have gone down to defeat.

The first important attempt to disregard the trade unions and to form a general union of railroaders occurred in 1877, when R. H. Ammon, in Pittsburgh, founded an organization to include engineers, firemen, conductors, trainmen and yardmen. The companies were slashing wages right and left, and the new union was designed to stop them. But it soon collapsed because of internal difficulties. Shortly afterward, however, the deep discontent of the men blazed forth spontaneously in one of the greatest and most violent railroad strikes in history, that of July-August, 1877.

But a far more serious and extensive effort was the one made by the Knights of Labor not long afterward. This famous organization was frankly revolutionary and aimed to combine the whole working class into one union. It was formed in 1869, but for the first dozen years of its life it led an anaemic existence. In the early ’80’s, however, it caught the imagination of the masses and raged across the country like a prairie fire. Hundreds of thousands were swept into its ranks, among whom were large numbers of railroad workers. The organization secured an especially strong grip on several Western and Southwestern roads, winning big strikes on the Union Pacific, Wabash, Missouri Pacific, Missouri, Kansas & Texas, etc., in 1884-5. But the

following year the wily and unscrupulous Jay Gould crushed the union on these roads in a bitterly fought two months' strike. A few years later, as the power of the Knights of Labor waned generally throughout the country, its railroad organization went to pieces, leaving the embattled, feeble craft unions alone in the field.

But not for long; soon the greatest of all dual railroad unions was under way. This was the American Railway Union, launched by Eugene V. Debs and a few others in Chicago in 1893. It was opposed by the craft unions, but as they were still weak, they could offer no effective resistance and it spread rapidly over the systems. By the Spring of 1894 it was said to have 465 local lodges and about 150,000 members. It included all classes of railroad workers.

Its first struggle with the employers came in April, 1894, on the Great Northern. That system was tied up from end to end by a general strike. The autocratic Jim Hill capitulated after eighteen days, coming to terms with the organization. But this brilliant victory bred an over-confidence among the men that soon brought about the destruction of their union. In an effort to force a settlement of the then pending Pullman strike, the militant railroad men placed a boycott against all Pullman cars, which action produced a general strike, June 26th, 1894, on twenty-four roads centering in Chicago.

The tieup was highly effective and the companies were on the way to defeat, when the Government and courts took a hand. Troops were rushed to Chicago; injunctions were issued against the strikers; their leaders were jailed, and such a general reign of terror set up that the conservative mass became terrified and draggled back

to work. Before three weeks had passed the strike was lost. The A. R. U. lingered along until 1897, when it turned itself into a co-operative political organization—the Social Democratic Party, forerunner of the present Socialist Party.

The advent of the American Railway Union, as is always the case with dual organizations, did great harm to the railroad craft unions. All of them were weakened and some nearly destroyed. Thousands of their best members quit them to take part in the A. R. U., only to find themselves blacklisted out of the railroad service later on because of the lost strike. The case of Debs himself is a striking example of the damage done. When he resigned his position as General Secretary-Treasurer and editor of the official journal of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen in order to form the A. R. U., he was a great force for progress in the old unions. Had he but stayed with them he would have been a big factor in their future development. But he was lost to them, and that they have suffered much in consequence no unbiased observer will deny. This constant sucking of the best blood out of the craft unions is one of the very worst features of dual industrial unionism.

A Flock of Dual Unions

Hard upon the heels of the American Railway Union came a whole series of dual unions on the railroads, some of them being but parts of general separatist movements, whilst others specialized in railroad workers alone. But all were alike in that they advocated the industrial form of organization and sought to realize it by going outside of the old unions and beginning anew. They are also alike in that none of them succeeded in establishing itself firmly on the railroads.

The first of these dual unions was the Socialist Trades and Labor Alliance, organized in 1895. A general labor organization, it made war upon the whole trade union movement. But it secured little or no hold on the railroads. In 1905 it was one of the organizations that were merged together to form the I. W. W.

An organization somewhat similar to the S. T. & L. A. was the Western Labor Union, organized in 1898 by the Western Federation of Miners. It was designed to supplant the entire existing labor movement, the railroad organizations included. But it was still-born, and after an anaemic struggle re-named itself the American Labor Union. It later went to make part of the I. W. W. at the latter's foundation. At no time did it become strong in the railroad industry.

A much more militant dual union on the railroads was the United Brotherhood of Railway Employees. This organization was started in 1900. It worked mostly in the West, and succeeded in getting a strong hold on several roads in that section. It had agreements with a few companies. But it finally went the way of all dual industrial railroad unions and collapsed. Just as it was about to expire it was fused with the other unions going to form the I. W. W.

The Canadian Order of Railwaymen was in existence during part of the period covered by the U. B. R. E. It was launched in 1901. It claimed jurisdiction over engineers, firemen, conductors, trainmen and yardmen in Canada. But it was unable to make good its claim in the face of the craft unions. It made no important headway and soon died off.

The next important one in the long list of dual industrial railroad unions is the Industrial Workers of the World. This organization was formed in 1905 in Chicago by an amalgamation of several industrial unions. It was intended to replace the entire trade union movement. Debs, Hall, Estes and many other active railroad militants gave it their hearty support for a time. But it has never been able to make substantial progress on any of the roads, except in the Canadian Northwest, where it organized the railroad construction workers ten years ago and waged several severe strikes in their behalf. At the present time it is not a big factor on the railroads.

The Workers' International Industrial Union is an offshoot of the I. W. W. It split off because of internal squabbles in 1908. Like its parent, it is a general dual union. But it has never been able to make a showing among railroad workers. It still exists in skeleton form.

Two later attempts to start dual railroad unions were those of the Industrial Railway Union and the Brotherhood of Federated Railway Employees. Both these organizations, bred of internal strife in the old unions, led brief existences in 1915-16 on a few Eastern roads. Neither secured any considerable following.

American Federation of Railroad Workers, One Big Union, and United Association of Railway Employees

The American Federation of Railroad Workers occupies a unique position among the many dual industrial unions that have sprung up from time to time on the railroads. While all the others have been radical, it is markedly conservative. It has had a checkered

history. Originally it was the International Association of Car Workers, an A. F. of L. union. But as there was a conflict in jurisdiction between it and the Brotherhood Railway Carmen of America, the A. F. of L. ordered the two bodies to amalgamate. The president of the I. A. of C. W. refused point blank to agree to this salutary measure, and surrendered his charter to the A. F. of L. at the Atlanta Convention in 1911. The organization struggled along for a few years as a craft union, and then, in 1915, it extended its jurisdiction to take in all railroad workers, calling itself thereafter the American Federation of Railroad Workers. Its membership at the present time is estimated to be about 9000, principally car workers. It has contracts on two or three railroads.

From its inception the A. F. of R. W. has been a thorn in the side of the old unions. It has done them much harm, to the glee of the companies. Its latest exploit is a clear betrayal of the great masses of workers on the roads. Just now, when the other unions are fighting to retain the national agreements, so that the gains of the past few years will not be lost, the officials of the A. F. of R. W. step in and sign an agreement with the Philadelphia & Reading, which not only gives up the principle of the shopmen's national agreement altogether, but also many of the conditions established by the same. But such are the fruits of dual unionism generally, no matter in the name of what high-sounding principle the rival organization operates.

The One Big Union was set afoot in Western Canada in 1918. It is a general dual union, organized upon the industrial plan and claiming all classes of workers. For a time it made great progress in Canada, assembling large numbers of workers, among them many railroad men, into its fold. Some railroad locals were established

in the United States also, notably in Chicago. But the movement has lost its impetus; it is waning rapidly and seems about to be eliminated.

The United Association of Railway Employees is an aftermath of the great, so-called "outlaw" yardmen's strike of the Spring and Summer of 1920, headed by John Grunau. It was formed of the various groups of strikers and blacklisted men. Numerically it is not strong. So far as the writer can learn, it has no agreements with the companies anywhere. It, too, appears to be moribund.

The strike that gave birth to this organization is a typical illustration of the unfortunate dualistic tendency that has long afflicted railroad men. It must be admitted that the men affected had crying grievances and that the union officials were asleep at the switch when it came to taking care of these grievances. But the wiser thing to have done, rather than to call the unauthorized strike, was to fight out the matter within the confines of the old unions. Had this been done there can be no doubt but that with the tremendous spirit of unrest and resentment prevailing, the leaders would have been spurred into action. Had a strike become necessary, it could have been widespread and official, and it would have surely resulted in a victory, so favorable were economic conditions. Undoubtedly the most wholesome effects would have been produced upon the unions. But no, impatiently the men first went out on the unauthorized strike and then into the new, dual unions. The results, easily to be foreseen, were the loss of the strike; the blacklisting of thousands of first-class union men out of the railroad service; the general weakening of the old unions; the strengthening of the conservative bureaucracies in these organizations, and the affliction

of the railroad industry with one more dual union to create disharmony and division.

At present there are five dual industrial unions on the railroads: The I. W. W., W. I. I. U., A. F. of R. W., O. B. U., and U. A. of R. E. All of them advocate the solidarity of labor, and at the same time all are waging war upon each other, as well as upon the craft unions. Their combined membership is only a fraction of the total number of railroaders organized.

Such are the results of the dual industrial union program after more than thirty years of effort on the part of thousands of active and earnest militants. Could a showing be more disappointing? It amounts to a failure complete in both theory and practice. Not only have the dualists failed to rally the masses to their program, but they have also failed to grasp the principles of solidarity. The spectacle of five dual industrial unions in one industry, all conceived in the name of solidarity, is tragically ridiculous. But that is the logical result of deserting the old unions and setting up utopian organizations. Other industries where similar tactics have been used show identical results.

In view of these facts should it not be evident that the long-hoped-for industrial union of railroad workers will not come through dual unionism? And is it not clear that this disruptive program should be finally and definitely abandoned? In the next chapter we will see how the industrial union is really being brought about through the evolution of the old trade unions.

CHAPTER III

The Evolution of the Railroad Trade Unions

Now, having seen the failure of the dual union program, let us examine the drift of the conservative masses towards industrial unionism, for as yet it can hardly be called a conscious movement.

Like the radical minorities, the great body of railroad men have responded to the pressure of the railroad companies. But their manner of doing so is vastly different. It is not their method to throw away their old unions, built through so much struggle and strife, and to begin all over again on an industrial basis, as the radicals have so long advocated. No, their's is the evolutionary way, the way followed almost universally by workers in improving their organizations, and the one taken by the railroad companies in building up their own power. They have no plan or theory, but move pretty much as immediate circumstances dictate. As they sense the need for more united action they extend and strengthen their old unions by striking up alliances with sister organizations. The general result is a gradual and steady, even if unrecognized, approach to the industrial form.

This evolution has gone on for many years. The stages making it up are many and complicated. In order that we may understand the process, and so that we will have a guide for future progress, let us review some of the details of this evolution. Of the sixteen principal railroad unions, we will first consider those in the transportation department; viz, Engineers (B. of L. E.), Firemen (B. of L. F. & E.), Conductors (O. R. C.), and Trainmen (B. of R. T.).

Evolution of the Transportation Unions

Originally the four brotherhoods, like all the other railroad trade unions, followed a policy of individual action. That is, each group fought its own battles, regardless of the others. When one struck the rest stayed at work, with the natural result that much bitterness prevailed among them. This was intensified by raging jurisdictional wars. The general result was to seriously weaken them all, and to make them pay dearly, through many lost strikes, for their lack of solidarity.

The first fighting unit used by the transportation unions against the companies consisted simply of the few workers in a single trade employed in only one town of a railroad system. For example, the conductors working out of a certain division town would negotiate an agreement with the company. Thus there might be a dozen agreements in effect for this one craft on the whole railroad. Naturally such a primitive method developed but little strength for the workers. Fighting as they did in such small detachments it was easy for the expanding companies to defeat them. So eventually they came to learn that they would have to operate on a broader scale. Then came the enlargement of the fighting unit until it included all the workers in a given craft upon a whole railroad system. Thereafter, our conductors, instead of acting together only in each division point, moved in concert all over the many divisions comprising the road. This type of one craft on one system became general.

But it was only a step. The companies, waxing rapidly rich and powerful, found that with all the departments of the system in operation, save one, it was not difficult to defeat a striking craft. Hence the need for a still more extended battlefront pressed heavily upon the workers, and in 1889 an effort was made to finally solve the

problem by federating the several transportation unions together on a national scale in the United Order of Railway Employees. But this federation was premature, and it fell to pieces in 1891 because of internal strife. Out of its ruins, however, grew one of the most important types of organization yet produced in this country. This is what is called the system federation.

System federations are alliances of several crafts on individual railroad systems. They operate to extend the fighting unit from one craft on one system to several crafts on one system. In the transportation department they bring about active offensive and defensive co-operation between the four brotherhoods on all matters relating to single railroads. This type of organization was proposed by the Engineers in 1890. It was adopted in 1892, under what is known as the Cedar Rapids Plan, but it did not get wide application until within the last fifteen years.

The system federations have done much to break down the intense sectionalism of the brotherhoods. Tending to make the crafts better acquainted with each other, they have checked jurisdictional quarrels and produced a better co-operation all around. Naturally their component unions have greatly increased in power from the extended scope of solidarity. This was clearly manifested in the big strikes on the Southern Pacific (1913), the Delaware & Hudson (1914), and the Chicago Belt (1915). All three were clean-cut victories. In each case the four organizations struck almost to a man and compelled the companies to grant their demands.

While the system federations were spreading throughout the country, the transportation unions, responding to the ever-present urge to get together, still

further extended their scope of action by means of territorial or divisional organizations and movements. In order to make it clear what these important developments signify it is necessary to explain that the Government, the railroad companies and the workers consider the railroads of the United States as falling into three “territories” or divisions : Western, Eastern and Southern. The Western Territory, or Division No. 1 comprises all the railroads West of and including the Illinois Central; the Eastern Territory, or Division No. 2, all those East of Chicago and North of the Chesapeake & Ohio; the Southern Territory, or Division No. 3, all those East of the Illinois Central and South of the Chesapeake & Ohio, including the latter system. [Following for simplicity’s sake the terminology in use among the A. F. of L. railroad unions, a Territory will be hereafter in this booklet referred to as Division No. 1, 2 or 3, accordingly as it is Western, Eastern or Southern. The railroads of Canada comprise Division NO. 4 in union practice, while the Independent railroad locomotive and car equipment plants in both countries constitute Division No. 5.]

The divisional type of organization enlarged the fighting unit of the crafts from the one system basis to that of the scores of roads that are to be found in each division, a significant advance. Henceforth, instead of the roads being handled separately on the questions of hours, wages, etc., they were dealt with in large numbers. But the divisional movements varied in character. Some consisted of only one craft, as, for example, those of the Engineers (Div. No. 1, 1908) and the Firemen (Div. No. 1, 1907); but eventually they came to consist of two crafts, thus doubling their scope. The Conductors and Trainmen inaugurated the latter type, when an alliance was struck up between them in 1901.

The Engineers and Firemen followed suit by a similar alliance in 1913. Several of these two-craft divisional movements were made. A typical instance was that of the Engineers and Firemen in 1915 on all the roads in the West, comprising Division No. 1. Approximately 65,000 men were involved.

The system and divisional federations were vast improvements over the primitive types of organization and they did much to develop the latent power of the brotherhood men, but evolution could not stop with them. In the face of the growing intelligence of the workers and the intensified power of the companies they had to give way to a still broader type. This was a concerted movement of the four organizations on all the railroads in the whole country. This big advance manifested itself in the great struggle for the eight-hour day in 1916-17. Over 350,000 engineers, firemen, conductors and trainmen were involved. It constituted the largest, well-organized wage movement known in America up to that time, and resulted in a victory for the men. To stem the threatened gigantic strike, Congress hastily passed the Adamson eight-hour law, and the mossback Supreme Court, under the lash, hopped around, and for about the first time in its history gave Labor a square deal by calling the law constitutional, just on the eve of the strike.

Thus, so far as we have gone, we find that the brotherhood men, responding to the pressure against them, have gradually extended their fighting unit from the narrow confines of one trade in one railroad town to broad-sweeping movements of the four trades on all the railroads in the United States. To one familiar with the gradual manner in which workers improve the structure of their labor unions this tremendous advance will stand

out as a long stride towards the inevitable industrial union in the railroad industry.

Evolution of the Shop Unions

Before going further with the four brotherhoods, let us turn our attention for awhile to the twelve other railroad unions, to note the evolutionary program they have made. These organizations are affiliated to the A. F. of L. and make up the Railway Employees' Department of that body. They divide into two general classes—miscellaneous unions and shop unions.

The miscellaneous unions consist of the Telegraphers (O. R. T.) , Clerks (B. of R. & S. C. F. H. E. & S. E.), Switchmen (S. U. of N. A.), Signalmen (B. of R. S. of A.), Stationary Firemen (I. B. of S. F. & O.), and Maintainance of Way (U. B. M. W. & R. S. L.). Their evolution has been comparatively simple and we will pass them quickly. For the most part, under the U. S. Railroad Administration, they made one jump from the early method of one craft on one system or in one town to a general agreement for one craft on all railroad systems.

But the evolution of the shop unions is much more advanced. Likewise it has been much more lengthy and involved. It clearly evidences the constant get-together tendency of the railroad organizations and it merits closer attention. The shop unions are the Machinists (I. A. of M.), Blacksmiths (I. B. of B. & H.), Boilermakers (I. B. I. S. B. & H. of A.), Carmen (B. R. C. of A.), Electrical Workers (I. B. of E. W.), and Sheet Metal Workers (A. S. M. W. I. A.).

Like the members of the brotherhoods, the shop workers also began early to learn the folly of each trade looking out for itself. They saw that it enabled the companies to pit one union against the others, and thus to defeat them all piecemeal. And they have undertaken to put an end to this condition by drawing up their forces into various kinds of federations, much as the brotherhood men have done, but without so many complications.

The first definite form of active co-operation among the shop trades was the familiar system federation. This type of organization did for the shop men what it did for the transportation men, expanded their scope of action from one craft on one system to several crafts on one system. They began to spread over the railroads of the country about 1905, and in a few years were established on many systems. But the shop men, less strategically situated in the industry than are the brotherhood men, have always had to fight harder to win concessions from the companies. Consequently their system federation movement met heavy resistance from the companies in a number of strikes, chief among which was the great Harriman Lines-Illinois Central walkout.

This big strike started in September, 1911, and lasted forty-five months, until June, 1915. It was one of the most bitterly contested strikes. in American labor history, and one of the most important. About 38,000 men were involved, scattered over the twelve railroads comprising the enormous Harriman Lines-Illinois Central system. The issue at stake was the question of federation; the nine unions insisting upon dealing collectively with the management, and the management insisting that they act one at a time. Both sides desperately fought out their issue. President Markham

of the Illinois Central explained the company's opposition as follows:

"It would only be a question of years until the operating men became members of the system federation. That would place this company at the mercy of a compact body of labor to enforce its demands by tying up the system at all points. It would mean taking the control out of the hands of the board of directors and placing it in the hands of organized labor. That's why I am opposed to the system federation plan of organization."

Nominally the strike was lost, the workers being compelled to go back to work without either their unions or a settlement. But practically a large measure of victory was achieved, because the company paid so dearly for its victory that other companies hesitated to go into similar struggles; with the result that the shopmen's federations thereafter were quite generally recognized wherever the crafts had any strength of organization. The big strike definitely established the system federation movement. It also resulted in making the Railway Employees' Department the best department in the A. F. of L., by bringing about the amalgamation of the original half-dead department with the Federation of Federations, an organization called into being to unite all the system federations.

As in the case of the transportation unions, the divisional type of organization developed among the shop unions side by side with the system federations. The first divisional movement of shop men took place in Division No. 3 in 1916. Twelve Southern railroads were involved. In Division No. 1 an effort was made along similar lines shortly after; but they unions, not yet

recovered from the big strike on the Harriman Lines-Illinois Central system, were unable to win their point. The companies blocked them, and compelled them to continue along with the old method of one craft or one system federation at a time, as the case might be.

At this stage of the shop unions' development the war broke out and the whole situation was revolutionized. The railroads were taken over by the Government; Director-General McAdoo issued his famous order No. 8 guaranteeing railroaders the right to organize; the workers streamed into the unions; local, system and divisional federations were hastily organized, and the shop unions fairly leaped even beyond the point of development reached by the brotherhoods in their great eight-hour movement of a couple of years before. They not only carried out national campaigns for hours, wages, etc., but in addition succeeded in negotiating a national agreement covering the whole six shop crafts upon all the railroads of the United States—thereby taking another long stride towards firmly uniting the great body of railroad men in one organization.

Transportation Miscellaneous and Shop Unions Unite

To recapitulate: So far as we have gone we find the sixteen railroad unions operating as follows: First, the four transportation unions, consisting of the Engineers, Firemen, Conductors and Trainmen, acting in close co-operation upon a national Scale. Second, the six miscellaneous unions, consisting of the Telegraphers, Clerks, Switchmen, Signalmen, Stationary Firemen and Maintainance of Way Workers, each proceeding separately, but all working upon a national basis. Third, the six shop unions, consisting of the Machinists,

Blacksmiths, Boilermakers, Carmen, Electrical Workers and Sheet Metal Workers, all working under a single national agreement.

This situation was a far cry from the primitive type of unionism described above. But evolution could not stop there. The same forces that had brought the organizations to this stage of development must continue to operate until there is complete solidarity among all railroad workers. It was inevitable that the two compact groups of transportation and shop unions and the scattering group of miscellaneous unions should strike up a co-operation among themselves upon a national scale. [A forerunner of the all-craft movement occurred on the Chicago & Eastern Illinois in 1915, when all the trades on that road joined forces in a system federation, the first of its kind. The system federation was unique in that it comprised all the railroad crafts, and not merely several of the more closely related groups, as had previously been the case.]

The first step in this direction had to do with political measures. The unions clearly recognized their industrial relationship and mutual interdependence in the Plumb Plan. To advocate this proposal they formed themselves into the Plumb Plan League, issued the joint journal, "Labor," and launched a general publicity campaign. But it was not long until this new co-operation also manifested itself on the industrial field, and in 1920 all the organizations united in a national movement for wage increases. At the present time we find the sixteen unions jointly resisting the assaults by the companies.

Thus, after many long years of evolution, the enormous army of railroad workers, beginning at the simple system of one trade acting at a time in each

division town, have finally arrived at the stage where all the trades are acting together simultaneously on every railroad in the United States. Although the lineup is yet far from perfect, the 1,850,000 railroad men, for the first time in their history, are moving in a body against the common enemy. The approach they have made to industrial unionism is unmistakable.

Much of this national, all-trades co-operation is unquestionably flimsy as yet. It may be that the present alliances will be partly dissolved through the shortsightedness of the men—though the sixteen trades strike on the Atlanta, Birmingham & Atlantic augurs well. But such setbacks can only be temporary. The evolution of the unions will go on, in spite of occasional reverses, until all the railroad workers of America stand solidly united in one organization, fully conscious of their common interests against the common foe, and determined to fight shoulder to shoulder to make them prevail.

For industrial unionists the facts cited in these two chapter should bear an important lesson. They make it clear as day that the dual unions have failed utterly, and that the trade unions provide the means for the realization of industrial unionism on the railroads. Not only have the latter organized 90 per cent or more of all railroad workers; but they are also constantly closing up their ranks in a manner that can only end in transforming them all into one organization. The part of wisdom then is to give up dual unionism and to devote all our efforts to the development of the trade unions.

The worst of the dual industrial unions is not so much that they have failed of themselves, but rather that they have greatly retarded the progress of the trade unions.

In the first place, they have discredited the very name of industrial unionism by associating it with secession, disruption and failure. And, then, by pulling thousands of live wires out of the trade unions they have robbed these organizations of tremendous support. It is safe to assume that if the large body of industrial unionists, for all these years, had stayed in the old unions, set up their ideal of industrial unionism there, and then worked for every practical measure making in that direction, we would have had an industrial union of railroad workers by now. But better late than never. This sensible policy should be followed henceforth, and a lasting goodbye said to dual unionism.

CHAPTER IV

The Next Step—Amalgamation

Sooner or later, the unions in all industries and in every country find themselves at the point where they are based upon industrial rather than craft lines. In arriving at this stage of development they ordinarily pass through a more or less lengthy evolutionary process, marked by three distinct phases, which I shall call: (1) isolation, (2) federation, (3) amalgamation.

In the first, or isolation phase, the several craft groups in a given industry act independently of each other, recognizing few or no interests in common. Eventually, however, grace to their own unfolding intelligence, to the growing power of the employers, to the elimination of skill by machinery, and to various other factors, they awaken to the ineffectiveness of this individualistic method, and begin to set up offensive and defensive alliances with each other. This brings them into the

second, or federation phase. And, finally, when by the working of the same factors, they perceive their loose federated form, although a big improvement over the previous system, does not develop their maximum power, they gradually fuse themselves together into a unified body along the lines of their industry. Thus they reach the third, or amalgamation phase.

This is the normal course of labor union development, the natural way of building industrial unions. Dozens of industrial unions in Europe have taken it, and our American trade unions are following suit. In common with other groups of unions in the food, clothing, metal, transport, building, printing, and other industries, the railroad unions are now in the secondary, or federation phase of development. That is the significance of their multitudinous local, system, divisional and national alliances, which constitute the most elaborate maze of federation ever constructed by unions anywhere. Nor will they stop with federation. They must go on to the next phase, amalgamation. In so doing they will be merely following the dictates of reason and acting in harmony with labor union evolution the world over. It will be the logical and inevitable climax to all the get-together movements, radical and conservative, among railroad men for a generation. Amalgamation of the sixteen railroad craft unions into one industrial union—that's the railroaders' next step.

The Failings of Federation

The situation is over-ripe for a general amalgamation of all railroad unions. Solidly united and inspired by a boundless voracity for profits and power, the railroad companies are resolved to smash the workers down to slavery. In this unholy task they have the active

assistance of the great banking and manufacturing interests. Common sense demands, therefore, that the enormous army of railroad men be brought to the highest possible state of efficiency in unflinching opposition to our would-be masters. Under the prevailing federated form this cannot be done. Amalgamation is the only solution.

Federation is all right so far as it goes. It marks an important stage in the workers' development from craft to class unionism. It is at once an admission of the ineffectiveness of craft action and a striving for industrial solidarity. Federation always sounds the death knell of pure and simple trade unionism. But the trouble with it is that it does not go far enough. It is essentially only a halfway measure. Afflicted with lingering craft weaknesses, it develops only a fraction of the workers' potential power. Despite federation the employers are still able to play one group of workers against the others and thus beat them all.

Whenever a federation goes into action, whether in conference or in strike, its weaknesses are instantly apparent. The autonomous unions lack cohesion and unity of purpose. The craft point of view prevails. Each union, animated by its particular craft prejudices and selfishness, looks first to the interest of its own members. Little or no power is conceded to the federation, which is looked upon pretty much as a mere matter of convenience. The idea of the general good remains in the background. Jealousies, squabblings and even betrayals are the order of the day. Consequently united action is out of the question. Federations can neither agree definitely upon a program, nor fight vigorously to put one through.

The Steel Workers' Federation

Railroad men have had a wide experience with federation, and many instances of the weaknesses of this type of organization could be cited therefrom; but it may not be amiss to mention something of what happened in the great organizing campaign and strike in the steel industry—for federation always works out the same.

The National Committee for Organizing Iron and Steel Workers was a gigantic experiment in federation. It consisted of twenty-four international unions, numbering over 2,000,000 members. While its work, like that of all federations, was a big improvement over the primitive condition of each union going it alone, still it was afflicted with the customary faults of such organizations. These contributed much to its final defeat.

In the great steel fight the need for the solidarity of labor was imperative. The Steel Trust was solidly united; its forces worked together like a perfect machine. But not so on the side of Labor—where there should have been unity, harmony and power, there was division, disagreement and impotency. Federation failed to make good. The twenty-four unions never really combined their forces, or organized their many wills into one firm determination to win. From first to last they lacked cohesion and singleness of purpose. And under their federated form of organization not even the great stake of the organization of the steel industry could spur them to unified action.

The National Committee, like all federations, lacked authority to command the resources and co-operation of its component unions. Instead of the campaign being

conducted from one central point, as the situation imperatively demanded, it was practically handled from the twenty-four union headquarters scattered all over the country. It proved impossible to get all the international presidents (who held the reins of power) assembled in one meeting, even in the most critical periods of the movement. Notwithstanding the most desperate appeals, the most gotten together at any one time was seven. The usual thing for the union was to send some minor official without power to act, which of itself condemned the National Committee to powerlessness. Then, when the committee attempted to function through these straw delegates and took important action, word would soon come from some headquarters, far from the scene of action, that they would not go along with the program outlined. Then other unions, hearing of this, would likewise balk, with the consequent collapse of the plan. This was the fate of many vital measures. Constantly the movement was paralyzed. It had to drift along as best it could with only a fraction of the strength of the twenty-four unions behind it.

Jurisdictional fights and craft jealousies embittered the unions and still further weakened their co-operation. There was also endless confusion in starting and finishing the strike, many local unions refusing to respond to the National Committee. In one case the officials of the International Union of Steam and Operating Engineers deliberately betrayed the whole movement because of a fight with the Electrical Workers over jurisdiction. They ordered their men to disobey the strike call and to remain at work. Similarly, the officials of the Amalgamated Association of Iron, Steel and Tin Workers sabotaged the organizing campaign and strike from beginning to end, because of jealousy towards the

other unions, if nothing worse. The regular attitude was for each organization to hold back, waiting for the others to take the lead, and fearing that if it stirred the others would take advantage of its good will. This meant paralysis all around; the unions weakest in resources and spirit seemed to set the pace for the rest. Nor could anything change the situation.

In the matter of finances the holding back tendency was particularly noticeable. Although actually with millions in their treasuries, the twenty-four unions gave the National Committee only the beggarly sum of $100,000 to carry on the whole organizing campaign and the strike. If hard-pressed almost any one of them could have done as well alone. Three outside unions, the Amalgamated Clothing Workers, the Ladies' Garment Workers, and the Fur Workers, contributed more than the twenty-four unions combined; viz., $190,000. Had the twenty-four unions been really united, instead of merely federated, they could, and certainly would have put in fifty times as much money as they did; not to speak of the strength they would have added in other ways. An industrial union of steel workers, under similar circumstances, would have surely defeated the Steel Trust.

Federation always demonstrates such defects. In the great Harriman Lines-Illinois Central strike there was the same manifestations of craft selfishness at the expense of the general interest; the same unwillingness of the several organizations to concede the necessary authority to the federation; the same planlessness and confusion in financing and directing the walk-out. It was truly said at the time that there were nine craft strikes, rather than one general strike. From first to last the various officials quarrelled bitterly among themselves.

Charges of indifference, sabotage and sell-out flew back and forth. Torn with dissension, the whole movement constantly faced disruption. Under such circumstances, typical of federation, a really effective strike was out of the question. All chances of victory went glimmering. Defeat resulted.

To attribute to the heads of the organizations involved the troubles developed in these strikes is wrong; the fault lies with the principle of federation itself. Wherever this kind of organization is in force the same failings manifest themselves, regardless of the class of leaders or the issues at stake. The experience of the Allies in the World War are typical: To begin with the armies of the several allied countries were practically federated. But naturally, real concerted action was impossible. No general strategy could be developed. When France was making a drive against the enemy, England, Italy and Russia would invariably be doing something the reverse of what they should be, and vice versa. Nor could the most pressing danger of defeat put an end to this condition and make the federation function efficiently. No relief was had until the principle of amalgamation was applied and the several armies placed under one head. This vastly increased their power and probably turned the tide of the war definitely in favor of the Allies. Whether in social or military warfare, unity of thought and action can only come through unity of organization. That is the great lesson railroad men have yet to learn and apply.

Our Present Weakness

In the existing status of railroad unionism the companies readily divide and defeat the workers. The alliance between the four brotherhoods, the federation

of the shop unions, and now the new national co-operation among all the sixteen unions, are still far from constituting a really compact form or organization. The companies have the key to unlock such combinations. They know how to cut the heart out of loose alliances and federations. From long experience with railroad federations they have learned that these bodies do not set up a genuine solidarity of labor; that the unions composing them are still upon a craft basis and in a pinch will put their particular interests above that of the federation. Upon this inherent short-sighted selfishness of craft unionism the companies constantly play with success. They habitually direct their attacks against one particular group of unions, when the others, not recognizing that the interest of one is the interest of all, and content that they themselves are not under fire, pull back into their shells and leave the attacked ones to their fate.

This has gone on since the inception of federation on the railroads and it must go on until federation is through with. Many's the time the companies, negotiating with the shop men's system federations, have practically destroyed the effect of these organizations by offering concessions to some of the trades, and thus enlisting their support in forcing into line the other trades to whom little or nothing was conceded. The present onslaught against the unions is being conducted in accordance with this historic strategy. Aiming to split the new national co-operation, the companies are directing their heaviest fight against the shop and miscellaneous unions, trusting that the brotherhoods will remain quiescent, as they seem likely to do. The destruction of the national agreements is sought so that the various system and divisional federations can be used against each other in the

tragically ridiculous way of former years. Amalgamation alone can meet the situation.

If in negotiations with the companies federation is only a makeshift, it is even worse when things come to a strike. Take the present situation, for instance. Suppose that should result in a rupture, as well it may. In that event it would surely provoke one of the most vital struggles in labor history. For such a battle the federated railroad unions are not properly prepared. They could not throw their united strength against the tremendous capitalistic combination certain to be opposed to them. Chronically divided by their craft character and incapable of real solidarity, the unions would have to go into the strike at a fraction of their efficiency. In the first place, the chances are that some of the organizations, pursuing the usual selfish policy, would stay at work and destroy the whole lineup. But even if this customary crime against Labor were not committed, even if the whole sixteen unions, rising superior to every attempt to separate them, all struck together and tied up the roads, still they would be far from developing their maximum power.

Sixteen autonomous organizations, each with its own set of prejudices and each with its own arbitrary will. Sixteen sets of organizers working at cross-purposes with each other and creating a world of trouble. Sixteen different strike relief systems, with the richer organizations paying high benefits and the poorer ones paying none. Sixteen headquarters in as many parts of the country all dabbling in the management of the strike and quarreling with each other.

Under such circumstances, inevitable in the present state of organization, endless confusion, disharmony

and weakness would surely result. A properly constructed strike, one that would bring out the real power of the workers and give them better than a fighting chance against their antagonists, would be impossible. It would be the steel strike and the Harriman Lines-Illinois Central strike all over again, only this time on a manifold larger scale. Of course, such a strike might be won. But if victory did come it would be due to the weight and strategic position of the workers, and not to the skill shown in organization. And the winning would amount to only a fraction of what it would were the workers really united. But the strike might also be lost. This is the chance that cannot be taken.

* * *

Federation must give way to amalgamation, just as isolation gave way to federation. There is no other way out of it. In the phase of isolation the unions, in spite of their handicaps, made considerable headway and abolished many abuses. In federation they have vastly increased their power and established conditions that amount to a semi-revolution in the railroad industry. But infinitely greater tasks lie ahead, tasks that will demand the utmost unanimity of purpose and action from the whole army of railroad workers. And this unanimity federation cannot give. So long as the unions remain autonomous bodies, each with its own set of officers, just that long will they stand first for their respective craft interests, to the detriment of the general welfare, and just that long will real unity among railroad men be impossible. This can only be had when the unions are all amalgamated into one body. Then the resultant organization, with one set of officials, one interest and one goal, will develop such tremendous

power that the workers will be able to make real progress on the long, hard road to emancipation.

CHAPTER V

A Plan of Amalgamation

When American railroad men embark upon the amalgamation of all their trade unions into one industrial union they will not be pioneers blazing a trail through an unknown wilderness. On the contrary, they will be setting forth on a well-travelled road, long since gone over by the railroad workers of France, Italy, England, Russia, Germany, Belgium, etc., on their way to freedom—for in all these countries all classes of railroad workers, save an occasional craft fragment here and there, are to be found in single organizations. In fact, the United States is the only important country in the world where the industrial form of union is not predominant among railroad workers. Here alone, where the need for solidarity is greater than anywhere else, is the antiquated craft type supreme—which does not speak well for our spirit of progress.

In considering measures to be taken by us for amalgamation we will do well to bear in mind the experiences of railroad workers of other countries. Great Britain, for instance, contains a lesson for us. In that country, it is true, the railroad organizations are not so completely industrialized as they are in Continental Europe; but the general conditions of unionism are so similar in the two nations, and the British unions have made so much progress towards industrial organization, that their achievements in this direction should prove valuable to us as a criterion.

The National Union of Railwaymen

The basic organization on British railroads is the National Union of Railwaymen (N. U. R.) , which includes all classes of railroad workers. But it has not yet succeeded in completely industrializing the situation. The Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen, which controls a portion of these two crafts, remains separate. Likewise the Railway Clerks' Association; but between this organization and the N. U. R. complete understanding exists, The two would amalgamate, but it is felt that inasmuch as the Clerks still have something of a "white collar psychology," it may be better to let them go alone until they know more about unionism and can stand fusion with the mass of less genteel workers. However, both unions work in closest co-operation. Besides the two separate craft groups there is also a dispute over the shop men, the metal trades unions putting in claims for and organizing numbers of these workers. But this difference bids fair to be settled along industrial lines. Notwithstanding these ragged edges, however, the N. U. R., with its industrial structure, is overwhelmingly the most important union on the railroads. Having over 400,000 members, or about four-fifths of all organized workers, and great prestige, it dominates the whole situation. It may well serve as a type.

The National Union of Railwaymen is the product of an evolution essentially the same as that which American railroad unions are now going through. It experienced the three familiar phases of isolation, federation and amalgamation. At first the various craft unions went it alone, with the usua1 unsatisfactory results. Then they tried federation; but that developed the same failings as it does here: the organizations

wrangled among themselves and lacked the power that comes from real unity. So finally the three most important among them, the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants, the General Railway Workers' Union, and the United Signalmen and Pointsmen, fused themselves together and formed the National Union of Railwaymen.

This was in 1913. The effect was electric. Immediately the whole movement leaped to the front. When the amalgamation took place the three combining unions had 156,000 members; eighteen months later the new organization had 300,000. A new spirit seized hold of the railroad workers. For the first time they were able to give unified expression to their needs and their power. They marched forward amazingly, and today their union stands in the very forefront of the British labor movement. It is playing a part in the industrial life of Great Britain such as the old railroad craft unions hardly dared dream of. The organization of the N. U. R. marked a new day for British railroaders.

The National Union of Railwaymen is an industrial union in the true sense of the word. For all the classes of workers under its jurisdiction it has one general headquarters, one set of officials, one financial system, and one point of view. Of its organization machinery, which is strictly modern in type, a very important feature is the manner in which it ascertains, harmonizes and defends the interests of its variegated membership. TO do this properly is always a big problem for broad-sweeping unions of the industrial type—to at once give expression to the many crafts, and yet to avoid the bitter wranglings that ruin the efficiency of the unions in the two primitive stages of isolation and federation. In fact, it is to solve exactly this problem that industrial unions

are called into being, and their value is to be measured by the degree in which they succeed with its solution.

The National Union of Railwaymen deals with this situation through a departmental form of organization—similar to that of other European industrial unions. Its national executive committee is composed of four sections, conforming to natural divisions of the industry; viz., (1) Locomotive, (2) Traffic, (3) Goods and Cartage, (4) Engineering Shops and Permanent Way. Each section numbers six men, or twenty-four for the whole committee. The effect of this is to give all the trades adequate representation, so that their interests may be intelligently looked after at all times.

In framing wage and other demands each section works out its own proposition and then submits it to the whole committee to pass on before it is incorporated in the general demands—which in turn have to be ratified by either an annual or a special convention. Experience shows that these trades sections are able to agree upon a common program and to give each other a square deal much more readily than would a group of federated trade unions. Very few disputes occur. This is because all the workers are members of one organization, which is shot through and through with the conception of the welfare of the general mass of railroad men. Narrow craft selfishness, always fostered, developed and strengthened by separate organization, is conspicuous by its absence in the industrial union. There is a distinct get-together tendency, a decided urge for solidarity. The general practicability of the system is shown in the wonderful growth and influence of British railroaders since the organization of the National Union of Railwaymen.

Locking the Unions Together

In joining their forces into one common body, as invariably they must sooner or later, American railroad unions will do well to adopt a departmental form similar to that of the N. U. R. Such a system would make for order and power throughout the entire union structure. In fact, it is the most practical and efficient method yet evolved to handle so many categories of workers as are to be found in the railroad industry. Conditions here make it advisable, however, that for a time at least there be more departments in the proposed industrial union than there are in the N. U. R. For it is idle to suppose that our highly individualistic craft unions, accustomed as they are to so much autonomy, would rush into an industrial union that would at once wipe out their trade lines. A better plan would be to assimilate them gradually. Therefore, to begin with, it would probably be found expedient to have one department for each of the amalgamated organizations. This would be no serious disadvantage. And then, later on, when the various trades, through contact with each other, had lost their narrow craft spirit; when they had become digested by the amalgamation, the number of departments could be decreased to conform more clearly to the natural divisions of the industry. Closely allied groups of trades, such as the Engineers and Firemen, could eventually be placed in one department; the Conductors, Trainmen and Switchmen in another; the metal trades (as fast as their organizations amalgamated nationally) in a third, and so on. Finally, the number of departments could be cut to eight, or if necessary, less.

The first step, and a mighty important one, in bringing about the proposed amalgamation, would be to popularize the plan in all the organizations and to put

them on record in favor of it. But let us suppose for a moment that this big job had been accomplished. Then the next step would be, at the amalgamation conference, or convention, to throw out a super-structure in front of the whole sixteen unions, definitely locking them together. This would be done by creating a national executive committed, based upon the departmental system, to handle the affairs of the new industrial union. In a pinch this committee might consist of the united executive boards of the amalgamated organizations; but the part of wisdom would be to construct it of about three delegates from each department; or—but it is not so good a system—of about 50 delegates chosen by the various departments on the basis of their respective voting strengths. Of course, the necessary general officers and sub-committees would also be provided for. This would lay the foundation of the industrial union.

One vital thing, the very essence of the amalgamation, and the measure without which it could have no meaning, is that the individual craft unions would completely surrender their autonomy to the industrial union. Thenceforth the latter would be supreme. It would formulate the demands of all trades, present them together to the companies as one proposition, and, if necessary, strike as one man to make them prevail. Craft autonomy would be a thing of the past.

The process of industrialization, begun by linking together the heads of the trade unions, would be extended as fast as possible throughout all their ramifications. The local, system and divisional federations would be extended to take in all the trades, and then knit tighter together to conform to the new, closer relationship. Wherever practicable the local unions would be actually amalgamated. The many sets

of officials, national, divisional, system and local, would be gradually transformed into one homogeneous force. The many journals would be combined into one powerful publication. Standardization of the dues and benefit systems would be introduced; grading the dues to fit the differently paid classes of workers, and preserving, if wanted, the heavy insurance features carried now by the transportation unions. A free transfer would be made to prevail between the different departments, and also a standard, uniform initiation fee, etc., etc.

A revolution in the prevailing convention system would be necessitated. Instead of sixteen craft conventions, as there are today, then there would be but one general gathering of representatives of all classes of railroad workers—the departments would not have either the need or the right to hold separate conventions of their own. The united railroad workers of America, possessed of one organization and one will, would meet in general national convention to work out their common problems. Along with the obsolete craft conventions would go their equally obsolete system of representation. As the industrial union would be a huge organization containing many thousands of local unions, naturally the local union as a basis for convention representation would have to be discontinued. This would be a blessing, for it is a primitive, expensive and impractical method. A much more fitting unit of representation is the system federation now used by the Railway Employees' Department. This system unit would probably be adopted, and the industrial union convention would be made up of representatives of the system organizations, either upon the basis of one delegate from each department of each system amalgamation; or, what is

more likely and practical, three or four delegates from each system amalgamation, selected by general election and without regard to their respective departments. This would at once insure a democratic and representative convention and keep its size within reason. It is instructive to note that the big National Union of Railwaymen limits its annual conventions to eighty delegates, elected at large from the various districts into which the organization is divided. The antiquated system of local union representation is not recognized.

The foregoing propositions have been written around the thought of the whole sixteen unions making a concerted move for amalgamation—for that is what should happen. The proposed industrial union should contain all the crafts, as the situation demands complete solidarity all along the line. Each of the organizations, no matter what its special conditions, had at once much to contribute to such a combination and much to gain from it. The amalgamation can never be thoroughly effective until all the railroad unions, large and small, strong and weak, become part of it.

But, in view of the fact that the unions are afflicted with large reactionary elements, who block every progressive movement, we have to consider the possibility that all of the organizations will not move for amalgamation simultaneously. It is very probable that amalgamation, like federation, will begin to show itself first in two or more streams among the closest related trades. In such an event, say, where several unions desired to amalgamate, they do so exactly along the general principles outlined above. They could set up their departments, one for each of the amalgamating trades, just as though all the unions were parties to the

plan. Later on, as the outstanding organizations woke up and came into the amalgamation, new departments could be provided for them, and representation given them on the national executive committee. The foregoing plan is feasible whether the unions all join hands at once, whether they first form several sets of amalgamations among themselves, and then link these together, or whether two or three trades start the amalgamation and then the other trades come in in ones and twos.

Should all the unions amalgamate simultaneously one effect would be either the remodelling of the Railway Employees' Department, along the lines suggested above, so that it could serve as the national executive committee of the industrial union (which would be the logical thing to do), or, in failure of such remodelling, its entire elimination as superfluous. But should the unions amalgamate piece-meal, two or more at a time, the Railway Employees' Department might probably continue much as it is, with the same system of representation, the same autonomy between the affiliated organizations, etc.; until finally the amalgamation had been completed, when the department would be faced by the same necessity as though all the organizations had fused together at the same time; namely, remodelling to meet the new condition, or abolition.

Of course, such partial amalgamations of two or more trades would be steps in the right direction. But they would not meet the needs of the situation. The thing that is wanted, and the thing that must be put through is the amalgamation of the whole sixteen railroad unions at the same time.

The Matter of Non-Railroad Affiliations

In working out an amalgamation project for the railroad industry consideration must be given to the very important fact that the unions therein divide into two distinct classes: (1) those whose membership is confined entirely, or practically so, to the railroads; (2) those that have large bodies of members in other industries. Of the first class, or purely railroad unions, are the Engineers, Firemen, Conductors, Trainmen, Switchmen, Carmen, Telegraphers, Clerks, Signalmen and Maintainance of Way Workers, ten in all. Of the second class, or semi-railroad unions, are the Machinists, Blacksmiths, Boilermakers, Electrical Workers, Sheet Metal Workers and Stationary Firemen—six in all.

Now a special problem arises from the fact that amalgamation would affect these two classes of unions very differently. In the case of the purely railroad organizations the matter is comparatively simple. Their whole membership would be involved and they would simply merge completely with the industrial union. But with the semi-railroad organizations the matter is much more complex. Only that portion of their membership working upon the railroads would be affected, and an unmodified amalgamation project would oblige them to surrender these large sections of members to the industrial union.

But it might just as well be recognized at the outset that the six semi-railroad unions would never agree to that—at least not within measurable time. In trade union practice all over the world it is found that while it is feasible, although difficult, to get unions to merge together completely, it is next to impossible to induce

one organization to surrender any considerable part of its members to another. This would especially be the case with our six semi-railroad unions. Deeply imbued as they are with craft union principles, and accustomed to fight bitterly over the control of a man or two, they could be depended upon to fight to the last ditch against giving up such large portions of their membership to the industrial union. They would wreck any amalgamation proposition based on such a program.

However, there is a way out of the difficulty. It lies in a modified amalgamation: As the basis of their refusal to give up their members, the six semi-railroad unions would argue with great weight that the mechanics have not only an industrial interest as railroad workers, but also a craft interest as trades-men. They would contend that the machinist or boilermaker who is now working on the railroad may be working next week at his trade in some other industry; and that, consequently, he has a direct interest in maintaining good conditions for his craft in all industries, and a moral obligation to belong to the organization that is doing that work. Whether right or wrong, this contention would have to be met, and it could only be met successfully by giving the men involved a double affiliation to correspond to their double interest. That is to say, the shop mechanics would at once be affiliated to the railroad industrial union and also to their respective craft unions. The two unions would divide between them the control over these classes of workers, each organization reserving the functions necessary to its proper working. Likewise, they could apportion the dues and per capita according to the services rendered by each organization.

Already there is a beginning of this system in the Railway Employees' Department. That organization is

an embodiment of the recognition of the common industrial interests of the many crafts going to make it up. It is continually encroaching upon the authority of its component trade unions. It has succeeded in securing a large measure of control over the shop mechanics, together with a share (all too small) of per capita to finance this control. but as yet only a start has been made. In an amalgamation along industrial lines the general organization would necessarily exercise a far greater degree of control than the Railway Employees' Department now does. It would have to have full sway over the bargaining and striking activities of all the railroad metal trades workers, and be financed with portions of their dues to correspond. Nothing short of this would do, because genuine solidarity and unity of action is out of the question in an industry if one or more outside organizations have to be consulted and harmonized before definite action can be taken.

In other words, the industrial union would handle the immediate interests of the shop mechanics in the railroad industry, and the craft unions would look after their more remote interests in other industries, their fraternal benefits, etc. Such an arrangement would, of course, throw the weight of the affiliation to the industrial union. The railroad metal trades worker would be a railroad man first and a boilermaker or machinist second. But even this double affiliation could hardly be considered final. Sooner or later the movement would reach the stage that it has in Continental Europe, where the shop mechanics belong entirely to the railroad industrial unions and have no connections whatever, except a free transfer, with the metal trades unions. But it will take a lot of education before we come to that. The bi-union system of control will probably have to be used for considerable time.

CHAPTER VI

Advantages and Objections

The supreme advantage of the amalgamation of all the railroad craft unions into one industrial union would be, of course, the enormous increase in economic power coming from the greater scope of activity, intensified solidarity and clearer vision of the larger body. From a series of detached, semi-organized fragments, incapable of outlining a real general program, or of making a concerted fight for it, the army of the railroad workers would be transformed into a co-ordinated whole, animated by a common purpose for every man in the industry and able to exert united, tremendous strength to achieve it.

But there would be other, special advantages. One of these is the killing of the dual industrial union idea. In Chapter II we have seen something of the ravages caused by this idea; how for over thirty years the old unions have been devitalized by the loss of thousands and thousands of first-class militants who have quit them to start new organizations. And unless this splitting off tendency is stopped it may well result, some time or other, in a general smashup of the unions that will set them back for many years. Only the amalgamation of the craft unions into an industrial union can put an end to this standing menace. Once such a combination is brought about then many invaluable militants, now lost to the movement, will devote their great potential strength to the productive work of building up the fused organization.

Amalgamation would also stop the many jurisdictional wars that now sap the strength of the railroad trade unions. Sidney Webb, a well-known English labor writer, once said that trade unions lose 90 per cent of their efficiency because of fighting among themselves. That there is much truth in this assertion railroad men know to their cost. Who can estimate the serious injuries wrought our cause by the long-drawn, fratricidal struggle between the Trainmen and the Switchmen? And that is only one of many. Except for amalgamation, there is no cure for such jurisdictional disputes between closely related railroad trades. So long as these trades are in different unions (even though federated) just so long will they steal each other's members and work, and just so long will internecine fights go on between them and ruin their efficiency. Only when they actually fuse together can these clashes cease. In an amalgamated organization there are no separate sets of officials, each preaching craft prejudices, and each trying to fatten its particular trade at the expense of the others. On the contrary, the officialdom of all industrial unions is homogeneous. Its point of view is the welfare of all the workers in the industry; it naturally seeks the elimination of craft narrownesses, not their perpetuation. Hence, what few spats do occur between the various groups are easily settled in a spirit of brotherhood.

Further advantages of amalgamation would result from large financial economies. Merging the sixteen national headquarters into one would make a great saving. Likewise the combination of the sixteen staffs of general officers and organizers. As things now stand the waste in handling the business of railroad workers is enormous. Duplication of effort occurs to an unbelievable extent. The sixteen groups of officials run

over the country without regard to each other. No real system or co-operation exists anywhere. Often local unions of one organization are allowed to fall to pieces for want of attention, while at the same time a half dozen paid organizers of the other trades are in the locality and not over-burdened with work; it is a common occurrence for two or more craft system chairmen to travel hundreds of miles together at big expense to look after some trifling grievance or organization detail that one could attend to as well; and so on with similar nonsense that a modern business concern would not tolerate for a second.

A general amalgamation would speedily straighten all that out. The work of administration would be unified and systematized throughout. With the departmental system in effect, vice-presidents, chairmen and organizers would look after several (as many as circumstances permitted) categories of workers—for everyone who has had contact with industrial unions such as the United Mine Workers knows how ridiculous is the current craft union notion that an official can represent and attend to only one trade, his own, efficiently. The saving in energy and money would from this one item be great. Moreover, the railroaders' affairs would be much better taken care of, and many organizers would be rendered available to unionize the vast armies of non-union workers employed in the independent railroad equipment plants and on the industrial railroads.

Additional financial economies would result from the new convention system. The present order of things is ruinously extravagant. Each of the sixteen organizations holds its own convention at enormous expense. With often as high as two or three thousand local union

delegates in attendance (most of whom look upon such affairs as mere vacation trips) the cost runs from $100,000 to $500,000 apiece. The natural result of such absurdities is that conventions are becoming fewer and fewer. But with a general industrial union, basing its convention representation upon the system amalgamation instead of the local union, there would be only a few hundred delegates in attendance, and they would be there for business. National assemblies could be held annually for a fraction of what it now costs for the mass craft gatherings, misnamed conventions.

Some Objections Answered

From the standpoint of the workers' interests there are no valid objections to the amalgamation we propose. The bewhiskered contention that the various crafts of skilled workers would be swamped by each other and especially by the masses of unskilled, and their interests neglected, was exploded long ago. It will not bear investigation. The same reactionary cry was raised when it was urged a few years ago to admit helpers and' handymen into some of the unions. But the prophesied dire calamity did not happen, nor would it occur in the proposed amalgamation. All over Europe there are industrial unions of building trades, metal trades, clothing trades, printing trades, railroad trades, etc., and the various groups composing them function freely and effectively. It is a matter of common knowledge that the skilled workers, in America and every other country, are well able to take care of themselves in any kind of a labor organization.

Those who fear the skilled workers' being overwhelmed reason from wrong premises. They take it for granted that the latter have a free will choice in the

matter, that they can co-operate with the mass or not, just as they see fit. But this is decidedly not the case. With the constantly increasing pressure against them, the skilled workers can no longer prosper going it alone; they are compelled to seek the assistance of each other and of the unskilled. It is a question of compulsion. By force of circumstances the skilled workers are compelled to compose their craft differences and to act with the mass. At first they try to do so by federation; but eventually, because of the imperfections of this type of organization, they are brought to amalgamation. In this way alone can they achieve the power they must have. With the skilled workers' unions, even as with those of the unskilled, the alternative is, "Amalgamation or annihilation."

Another objection (although a shameful one indeed to come from a movement based on the principle of "an injury to one is the concern of all") that is levelled against all projects to affiliate the trades more closely together is the assertion that in a general railroad amalgamation the strongest organized trades would have to pull chestnuts out of the fire for the weaker ones. Because the workers have been unable to pierce its seeming truth, this pitiable sophistry has served to wreck many a promising get-together movement. Always contrary to fact, even when some of the trades were entirely unorganized, it no longer has a semblance of verity. Today every branch of the railroad service is so thoroughly organized that even the blindest cannot help seeing, if they only will, that each of the sixteen unions would add great strength to a railroad industrial union. Indeed, some of the trades long considered weaker sisters, are now in a position, if it came to a struggle, to give a better account of themselves, than many other crafts who take great pride in their skill, organization

and strategic position in the industry. There is no longer even a pretense of a reason for the trades not to join each other in closest alliance. All would be gainers from such co-operation.

A favorite argument against every improvement in the unions is the contention that the trade unions in this country are the most effective of any in the world, coupled with citations of the higher wages prevailing in the United States to prove it. That wages are higher here than almost anywhere else is incontestable; but to say that the superior efficiency of our organizations is responsible for them is ridiculous. Anyone acquainted with the facts knows that in many respects our movement lags behind that of Europe. Rather the credit is due to the unprecedented development of America's marvelous resources, which has made our fight easier than in other countries. But in any event the more we improve our unions the better results we will get, and amalgamation is always a great improvement.

Old-line craft unionists also object that the great size of the proposed amalgamation would make it unwieldy and unworkable. But there is no bottom to that contention either. The fact is there are many such gigantic combinations already afoot and functioning successfully, and with more in prospect. In Germany, for instance, there is the monster metal workers' union, with 1,800,000 members, ranging from jewelry workers to shipbuilders and steel makers. The German railroaders are also about to combine (if they have not already done so) with the telegraph, telephone and postal workers, which will give this great transportation-communication organization more than 1,500,000 adherents. The British mine workers' union numbers almost l,000,000 members; and the Triple

Alliance of the same country, approximately l,800,000 coal miners, railroaders, and transport workers. Practically the entire Belgian working class is organized in twelve industrial unions, and now a plan is being put into effect to combine all these industrial unions into one organization. The possibilities of labor unionism outstrip even the dreams of the orthodox craft unionism.

All these great combinations of labor, and many more that could be mentioned, have grown gradually through voluntary federation and amalgamation. They are the fruits of practical experience. The rapidity with which they are growing and multiplying is a standing proof of their superiority over the primitive, narrower types. The workers composing them have learned through actual practice that only by massing themselves into such enormous aggregations can they properly defend their interests. No, the argument about size will not serve. If European workers can successfully construct such large organizations, so can American workers.

A more powerful objection to amalgamation, however, than any of the foregoing is one that is never expressed by those holding; viz, the fear of the higher officials of the craft unions concerned that in the new, more economically operated industrial union they will lose their authority, and probably their very jobs. This fear is by far the most serious hindrance to amalgamation; it always does more to block the fusing of labor organizations than any other factor. Few officials can rise above it. No matter how badly amalgamation may be needed, the almost invariable attitude of officialdom is to fight against it relentlessly. This is so well-known as to be a commonplace of the labor movement. Therefore, all over the world genuine

amalgamation movements have to surge up from the rank and file.

Unquestionably there would be considerable justification for some of this job-fear in a general railroad amalgamation. Instead of sixteen presidents, as now, then there would be only one. The rest would have to play second fiddle, with a certain restriction of their power and prestige, and also a very probable trimming of their salaries down to more modest sizes. But as for an actual reduction in the number of officials, that does not usually occur in amalgamations. There is always so much work to be done in an organizing and administering way, and the amalgamated unions are so much better able to go ahead with it than were the individual unions, that the tendency is rather to increase the staff than to decrease it. But let that be as it may, earnest railroad union men will never let such considerations stand in the way of the combination of our many weak organizations into one strong one.

CHAPTER VII

In Conclusion

In the foregoing pages we have pointed out the militant aggressiveness and fathomless greed of the railroad companies, how they are seeking to enslave their workers, and that the only hope of the latter is to make united resistance as one great army. We have also pointed out the glaring weaknesses of the unions as they now stand, and shown that only in industrial unionism can the workers exert their maximum economic power. But we have likewise indicated the folly and ruin of trying to achieve the needed industrial union by going

outside of the old unions and starting new organizations. We have explained that the natural development of labor unions to the industrial status is through the three phases of isolation, federation and amalgamation; and also that our railroad unions, now in the federation phase, must inevitably pass on to the next one, amalgamation. And finally, we have outlined a practical plan of amalgamation, citing the many advantages that would come from industrial unionism on the railroads and answering the alleged objections thereto.

Now, the big job is to put the proposed amalgamation into effect. This can be readily accomplished if the multitudes of progressives and radicals in the railroad industry will put their shoulders to the wheel. Industrial unionism through the amalgamation of the sixteen craft unions should be made a live issue wherever railroad workers congregate: in the shops and offices, on the roads, at the meetings of the local unions and of the local, system and divisional federations; at the national conventions of the Railway Employees' Department and of the individual craft unions. The many journals should be filled with the idea. If all this is done it will not be long before such a body of favorable sentiment is created that the sixteen unions can be combined into one, and the amalgamated organization launched into a career of power and success now hardly thought possible.

Of course, the standpatters in the unions will vigorously oppose this amalgamation project. They will argue that the present network of federation and semi-federation constitutes the highest attainable degree of solidarity. But that is only to be expected; such reactionary elements are constitutionally against all progress. Blinded by ignorance, or dominated by some

petty selfish interest, they have combatted every step in the evolution of the railroad unions. They are apostles of things as they are. When the system federation movement began to take root they denounced it as an unnecessary and dangerous innovation. It was the same with the divisional federations and every other progressive movement initiated by railroad men. Such conservatives are the greatest of all hindrances to the progress of the working class. They hang like a millstone about its neck. Their opposition is more destructive even than that of the employers themselves. Had we railroaders hearkened to the creakings of this "it-can't-be-done" element we would be still striking one craft at a time in each division town—that is, if the companies had not destroyed all semblance of unionism in the meantime. Every pace forward has been won in spite of their bitter opposition, and so it will be with amalgamation. To accomplish that task is a job for the progressives and radicals.

But while we are working for the amalgamation of the railroad unions into one industrial organization we must never forget that that, too, is only a step on the workers' road to power. We cannot stop with that measure; we must press on still farther. Next we must form alliances with the miners and transport workers, as the British railroaders have done in the Triple Alliance. And then, with that accomplished, we will go on and on, building up still greater combinations of Labor, until finally we have the whole working class solidly united in one militant organization.

The trade unions are more than merely a means to win a few cents an hour more in wages or a few minutes a day less of work; they are battalions of an army of emancipation in the making. The greedy railroad

autocracy is intolerable. It must go, and along with it the balance of the parasitic capitalist class. Private property in social necessities must be abolished root and branch. There is no other cure for our industrial troubles. Then, and only then, will war, poverty and exploitation come to an end. To do this great work is the supreme mission of the labor movement. At heart and in their daily action the trade unions are revolutionary. Their unchangeable policy is to withhold from the exploiters all they have the power to. In these days, when they are weak in numbers and discipline, they have to content themselves with petty achievements. But they are constantly growing in strength and understanding, and the day will surely come when they will have the great masses of workers organized and instructed in their true interests. That hour will sound the death knell of capitalism. Then they will pit their enormous organization against the parasitic employing class, end the wages system forever and set up the long-hoped-for era of social justice. That is the true meaning of the trade union movement.

(THE END)

Militants, Notice!!

The Trade Union Educational League is an organization to carry on educational work in the trade union movement. It aims to bring about the solidification and closer affiliation of our existing organizations. Believing that all the workers should stand together, regardless of their opinions, it is against the policy of radical and progressive-minded workers quitting the trade unions and starting rival organizations.

The Trade Union Educational League is in no sense a dual labor union, nor is it affiliated directly or indirectly with any such organization. It aims to infuse the old unions with a new spirit and to bring their structure into harmony with modern economic conditions, through a program of federation and amalgamation, along industrial lines. For this purpose it bespeaks the active co-operation of all militant union workers.

Write to the undersigned for further details—

Wm. Z. FOSTER, Sec'y-Treas.

4232 1/2 Michigan Avenue, CHICAGO, Illinois

Railroad Men!

Help forward the cause of amalgamation.

This pamphlet should be in the hands of every railroad worker.

Every local should order copies for its entire membership.

Liberal commissions offered to agents.

Become our agent in your town.

RATES (Postage Prepaid)

Single Copies 25 cents per copy

Bundle Orders (10 or more) 15 cents per copy

Special Rates to Agents

All Orders Payable in Advance

Send Remittances to

Trade Union Educational League

4232 1/2 Michigan Avenue

CHICAGO