T.U.C. EDUCATIONAL FACILITIES

YEAR BY YEAR the T.U.C. General Council carry forward their plans for expanding the provision of trade union education. Their programme now includes an annual summer school at Oxford, and day schools and week-end schools serving the areas of Federations of Trades Councils. They will shortly initiate in London a series of monthly courses of training for trade union officers and active members.

Students for the summer school and the training courses are recruited through affiliated organizations, and for the day schools and week-end schools through Trades Council Federations.

The notice of working-class students is also drawn to the residential courses organized by Ruskin College, Oxford, and to the day and evening courses in trade union studies provided at the London School of Economics.

A limited number of scholarships is offered annually by the Trades Union Congress Educational Trust for these courses at Ruskin College, Oxford, and at the London School of Economics.

Full details of all these educational facilities may be obtained by Trade Unionists from the head office of their organization.
A SHORT HISTORY OF BRITISH TRADE UNIONISM

A T.U.C. STUDY PAMPHLET

TRADES UNION CONGRESS

LONDON : 1947
**FOREWORD**

1 **THE STUDY OF TRADE UNION HISTORY**
   Periods of Trade Union History 5

2 **TRADE UNION BEGINNINGS**
   Labour Conditions in the Eighteenth Century 6
   Early Workers' Organizations 7
   Legal Position of the First Unions 8
   The Industrial Revolution 9

3 **REPEAL OF THE COMBINATION ACTS**
   The Grand National 11

4 **THE TRADE UNIONS FROM 1850 TO 1914**
   The New Model 14
   The Trades Councils 15
   The New Unionism 16
   1900 to the War of 1914-18 17

5 **THE WAR OF 1914-18** 21

6 **THE PERIOD BETWEEN THE WARS**
   Unrest and Repression 22
   The Movement Towards Closer Unity 22
   In Depression and Recovery 23

7 **THE WAR OF 1939-45**
   Problems of a War Economy 26
   The Role of the Trade Unions in Wartime 26
   Reconstruction Planning 28

**RECOMMENDED READING** 30
FOREWORD

by

VINCENT TEWSON, C.B.E., M.C.

General Secretary of the Trades Union Congress

THIS BOOKLET is not intended to be more than a guide to the history of our British Trade Union Movement. Indeed, no comprehensive account has been presented since the Webb's standard work was published a quarter of a century ago.

But the booklet will serve as an introduction to the history of the Trade Unions. The student may use it to find the landmarks on the path of Trade Union development. The recommended course of reading will fill in the gaps that remain in his knowledge and enable him to plot the path in greater detail.

Trade Union traditions are a part of the British heritage. Too often those traditions are taken for granted and the most enthusiastic spokesman of Trade Unionism tends to forget the sacrifice, the voluntary effort, the courage and the constancy that went into its building. Even in the country of Trade Unionism's birth there still remain pockets of resistance to the elementary principles of our Movement and many of our present-day problems call for the exercise of the qualities displayed by the pioneers. Let our history remind us of the road we have travelled and of the way ahead.

The times in which we live and the widening responsibilities that Trade Unionists are called upon to undertake make it more than ever important that we shall be clear in our purpose and constructive in our approach to our new tasks.

During the war, despite the hazards and inconveniences, the T.U.C. never abandoned its educational activities. But, of necessity, the number of our publications diminished. The opportunity provided by these more favourable postwar days has been taken to bring this brief history up to date. It is the first in what we hope will be a series of booklets of educational value to the Trade Unionists of Great Britain.
Not all the books we recommend are readily available; some are expensive, some are out of print. But it is not beyond the resources of any public library to secure them (from the National Central Library, for instance) for the determined student.
1 THE STUDY OF TRADE UNION HISTORY

History in the widest sense of the term takes in the whole story of the human race and all its activities, but it is obvious that if we want to know more than a little about one of these activities we must concentrate on it to the exclusion of most of the others. But here we must be careful not to exclude any that are necessary to the understanding of our subject. Trade unions are bound up with the ways in which men and women earn a living and are the result of their aspiration and will to improve their condition of life. Thus they cannot be studied in isolation from the methods of production and the organization of society from which they develop. Any trade unionist today can think of many things—the machine he uses, the expansion or decline of an industry, booms and slumps, the impact of wars and their aftermath, and so on—which vitally affect his livelihood and his union’s policy, and he will appreciate that all these things must have had a great influence on the first appearance and later development of the trade unions. It is important to observe, too, that trade unionism is only one wing, the industrial section, of a greater working-class movement. A trade unionist of today, who sees that some of his aims are best promoted by political means, will recognize that political events must have had a significant bearing on the development of trade union activities and policy. Therefore, in looking at the history of trade unions, although our main interest will be in the unions themselves, we must always keep an eye on other related happenings which influence and are influenced by the combination of working people.

Periods of Trade Union History

Although the periods into which we have divided the history of the trade unions are chosen largely for convenience, as a stretch of over two hundred years without a break is not very manageable, they also represent well-defined stages in develop-
ment. Our account starts in the eighteenth century with the labour conditions from which the early unions sprang, and the first period ends with the repeal in 1824 of the Combination Acts which had prohibited workers' associations. Next is the "revolutionary" period of widespread industrial and political unrest up to 1851, when the Amalgamated Engineering Union set the new example of the modern, well-organized and powerful craft union. 1851 to 1914 sees the legal recognition of the trade unions and the appearance of the great general workers' unions. The war of 1914-18 is a period of its own, in which the assumption by the unions of responsibility in the national cause gave them a new importance in the State. The years between the wars reveal the strengthening and consolidation of the Trade Union Movement, the great struggle of the unions in the postwar depressions, the National Strike and its legal consequences, the growth of non-manual unions, and the increasing activities of all unions in public functions of great social importance. Not least of these developments was the emergence of the T.U.C. as the powerful and nationally respected representative of organized labour. In the latest period the Trade Union Movement reaches the highest pitch of its influence and responsibility, both in preparation for, and conduct of the war, and in planning and carrying through an orderly return to a peace economy and a labour programme of social and economic reconstruction.

2 TRADE UNION BEGINNINGS

Labour Conditions in the Eighteenth Century

Nearly to the end of the eighteenth century, that is to the time of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars, England was still a self-sufficient agricultural community of small farmers and peasant proprietors. Industry was carried on throughout the country by individual craftsmen in small workshops, and the bulk of goods for distant markets—chiefly textiles—was produced under the domestic system in the workers' own homes, the necessary distribution being effected
by travelling middlemen. Factory conditions were beginning, however, in mining, iron production and a few manufacturing trades, while in the West of England woollen industry the workers, unlike their fellows in the North, had become dependent wage-earners. It was the growing distinction between employer and employed and the emergence of a numerous and permanent wage-earning class in close contact with one another that provided the conditions for successful combination. Wages were low, and a long working day left the very minimum time for food and rest.

As the domestic type of industry declined and was replaced by factory production, a corresponding change took place in social life. Families could no longer live and work together under one roof as before, and there was a break-up of home life, as not only the men, but the women and children as well, took employment wherever it was offered. This meant the loss of their independence and the end of the simple comforts and support that the family group could offer to its members.

In these days wages, industrial training and employment generally were still regulated under a code laid down by the State two hundred years before. But, with the increase in the extent and variety of trade, this code, which entailed the fixing of wages by the local justices, became unworkable, and the legislation was eventually repealed long after it had become a dead letter. This left the workers at the mercy of the new capitalist employers, and their first move was to call for the restoration of the old conception of "customary wages," and protection by the law.

Early Workers' Organizations

The trade clubs and temporary combinations of workmen which appeared in the eighteenth century or even earlier were mostly small and local, and contact between them and mutual aid were hampered by the backward state of communications. They were found mainly among the skilled artisans of London and the older towns—for example, tailors, printers—whose bargaining power increased as population and trade grew, or
in those manufacturing industries, such as the woollen industry
in the west and the coal industry in the north-east, which were
in the control of capitalist employers. No clear line could be
drawn between their industrial and their friendly society
functions, and on the industrial side their activities were
generally narrowly confined—craft regulation, the negotiation
of agreements on wages with their employers, occasional
strikes, more commonly appeals to Parliament for legal
protection. There were continual petitions to Parliament for
the first half of the eighteenth century for a return to statutory
wage regulation. Many were successful, but after 1750 State
regulation was being given up in many directions under the new
policy of economic “freedom.” The workers’ only hope was to
unite for strength and to press their grievances on their
employers. Collective bargaining had arrived, but was to face
great opposition.

Legal Position of the First Unions

Although Parliament was removing the workers’ legal
protection against exploitation, it regarded as a great evil any
attempt of the workers to combine for their own defence.
Combination to change wages or hours had been a criminal
offence under a number of Acts which assessed wages and
sometimes fixed hours for particular trades. This prohibition
applied in theory to both masters and men on the technical
grounds that trade combinations were an encroachment on the
State’s right to govern industry. In practice, the law kept the
workers in subjection, to the satisfaction of the country gentle-
men who ruled in Parliament, and prosecutions or threats of
prosecution for violations of the statutes or for the common
law crime of conspiracy were frequent. Laws were passed
prohibiting combination among tailors in 1720-21; among
woolworkers in 1725-26; and among silk workers in 1773.
Similar Acts followed and were crowned by the Combination
Acts of 1799-1800 which laid down a general prohibition of all
combinations of workmen for any purpose relating to their
employment. The governing class had taken fright at the
French Revolution just across the Channel and saw sedition on
every corner. In spite of savage punishments for those con-
victed, there were widespread attempts to evade the law by
secret societies, and frequent violent clashes when strikes and
lockouts took place. By 1800 trade unionism had gained
a precarious hold in many branches of industry and a few
unions had won a permanent place.

The Industrial Revolution

The changeover from domestic hand production to machine
production in factories took a long time, but the first quarter
of the nineteenth century saw the worst effects of this transition
on the lives of the workers because of the long war with France
and its aftermath.

Industry was concentrating on the coal fields to use the new
steam power, and conditions of life in the factory towns were
appalling. Men, women and children slaved day and night
among poverty and disease, while their masters made fortunes,
and built up the industrial supremacy of Britain. Enclosures for
large farms during this period turned great numbers of workers
off the land and into the factories, while serious unemployment
and distress followed the end of the wars in 1815. The Govern-
ment did nothing to improve things, and the Poor Law system
of doles subsidized industry with pauper labour.

Skilled workers, whose standards were menaced by the
introduction of machinery and factory production, reacted
with machine-wrecking campaigns like that of the Luddites in
the Midland hosiery trade. Violent strikes by the Lancashire
cotton and wool workers and by the unions of miners in
Northumberland and Durham were suppressed with the help
of the military, and their leaders punished. Some unions,
notably the cotton operatives, were still appealing for State
regulation of wages under the old code which was finally
repealed in 1813-14, but others chiefly in the older towns, were
making headway. Collective agreements were made by the
London printers in 1805 and in the coopering trade in 1813.
A few unions maintained negotiations with the sympathy of
enlightened employers, but in the textiles and mining any
attempt at organizing was generally punished by long terms of
imprisonment, while strikes were nearly everywhere suppressed. Repression was intensified after 1816, when the factory workers showed signs of drawing closer to the Radical movement for political reform; panic legislation followed, and only as trade and industry recovered after 1820 did a more tolerant attitude temporarily prevail.

**RECOMMENDED READING**

"History of Trade Unionism," Sidney and Beatrice Webb (Chapters 1 and 2)


"Labour Legislation, Labour Movements and Labour Leaders."

George Howell (Volume I, Chapters 3-7)

"Short History of the British Working-Class Movement."

G. D. H. Cole (Volume I, Chapters 1-5)

"Legal History of Trade Unionism," Hedges and Winterbottom (Chapters 1-3)

"The Old Trade Unions," William Kiddier


**NOTES**
A turning point in trade union history was the repeal, in 1824, of the Combination Acts, which had prohibited the very existence of a trade union. The repeal was secured by Joseph Hume, a Radical M.P., and Francis Place, the tailor of Charing Cross, who, believing that freedom to combine would convince the workers of their powerlessness to improve their conditions, took advantage of the easing of class feeling and smuggled the Bill through Parliament. The trade unions were at last within the law, and there followed a frenzy of striking and organizing which alarmed the Government. A more stringent Act was passed in the following year, in the face of widespread union opposition, severely limiting trade union activities, but not touching their essential right to exist. New organizations sprang up among metal workers, carpenters, shipwrights and miners; other societies already existing secretly now came out into the open. The first great phase of the struggle was over with the removal of the primary legal disabilities under which the trade unions had previously struggled for existence. They had won recognition from society, and were now to start on a long campaign for freedom of action to attain their objects.

The Grand National

The next ten years saw the failure of ambitious attempts to transform the little isolated societies of workers into great national federations of labour. A union of workers in all trades had been unsuccessful in 1818, and another, the National Association for the Protection of Labour, formed in the textile trades, lasted only two years. The Grand National Guild of Builders went the same way. These attempts at large-scale organizing, stimulated by the failure of the Reform Act of 1832 to enfranchise the working class, culminated in Robert Owen’s Grand National Consolidated Trades Union of 1834, which soon had half a million members and was as unwieldy as its name. Owen was a successful Socialist propagandist and his idea was for a general strike which would transform society. Instead of the national stoppage, regional strikes broke out in many places, and the Government retaliated with heavy
sentences on their leaders under the 1825 Act, and other Acts directed against political uprisings, which tied the unions' hands when it came to action. Outstanding examples of the Government's attitude were the savage suppression of the "last labourers' revolt" in the agricultural south of England in 1830, and later the conviction and transportation to Australia in 1834 of the "Tolpuddle Martyrs" for forming a local union of agricultural labourers as part of the Grand National. The Scottish textile workers were others among the many victims of ruthless oppression, while in Durham the miners who struck for fairer conditions were evicted from their homes. The Grand National broke down, and the era of revolutionary trade unionism was followed by the Chartist Period, during which political activities held the workers' attention while the unions were revising their aims and methods. Many local societies and some national unions, such as the Stonemasons and the Carpenters, preserved their organization, and during the '40's the engineering unions rose from obscurity and began to draw closer together in a movement which culminated in the formation of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers in 1851.

RECOMMENDED READING

"History of Trade Unionism," S. and B. Webb (Chapters 3-4)
"British Working-Class Politics, 1832-1914," G. D. H. Cole (Chapters 1 and 2)
"Legal History of Trade Unionism," Hedges and Winterbottom (Chapter 4)
"The Chartist Movement," Mark Hovell (particularly Chapters 6-10).
The first half of the century had seen continued social unrest resulting from economic depressions and the strain of building up a great industrial system. By 1850 this system was working at full pressure, and Britain had become the richest and the greatest industrial and commercial power in the world. Developments in joint stock organization and banking and an increase in national saving relieved the shortage of capital which previously had had a depressing effect on wages. A long period of national prosperity—the so-called “Golden Age” of capitalism—followed, during which the ever-growing profits of the manufacturers were reflected, though with many a hard struggle, in higher wages and better conditions for certain sections of organized workers. It was seen that the higher standards might be reached without revolution, and the trade unions set out not to overthrow the system, but to increase their share of its proceeds. Unions set themselves more immediate, practical aims, and their methods became more businesslike.

The Amalgamated Society of Engineers, formed in 1851, set the example. It developed a centralized organization with district committees, and accumulated large funds from its comparatively high contributions. Friendly benefits and legal defence were provided for its members, and it was able to survive a three-months’ lockout by the newly-formed employers’ federation. Many other unions, notably the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners (1860), increased their resources and built strong centralized organizations in constant contact with their branches by means of the new railway and telegraph facilities. Union journals were also started which did much to hold the membership together. Industrial action was now on a much larger scale than the earlier isolated conflicts with individual employers. Entire trades in various districts were involved, and sympathetic action by other unions helped to bring the whole weight of the Movement to bear, as in the case of the London Builders’ strike in 1859, against attempts to
destroy the workers' organizations. Employers' federations countered with joint action, lockouts were frequent, and the conflicts took on a national character. For several years after 1860 organized labour took its lead from the "Junta" consisting of the leaders of the Engineers, the Ironfounders, the Compositors, the Shoemakers, and the London Bricklayers, who were already seeking political reforms to make the unions' task easier.

It must not be thought that the Amalgamated Society of Engineers became the model for all the unions which made headway in the '50s. While its method of organization and policy might suit societies of skilled workers, other unions, such as the cotton operatives and the miners, shaped a course better adapted to their own particular aims, which included legislative protection to improve working conditions.

The Trades Councils

Permanent Trades Councils began to be set up at this time for propaganda and organizing work, and helped further to develop a united movement. The London Trades Council was formed from a strike committee in 1861 and provided a meeting place for trade union leaders for a number of years. Other Councils appeared in big towns like Liverpool, Sheffield and Glasgow, and the Trades Union Congress, called by the Manchester Trades Council, first met in 1868. From 1871 Congress met annually and, with its Executive Committee, provided the Trade Union world with a central authority.

The spread of machinery created many new classes of skilled workers, such as tinplate workers and boilermakers, whose conditions of work favoured the growth of trade unionism. Among the textile workers and the miners and in all the older trades the unions were strongly entrenched. Amalgamation proceeded and the unions' growing power seems to have alarmed the employers and the Government. One of the common aims which the unions set themselves was the reform of the Labour Laws, which, save for a measure legalizing peaceful picketing in 1859, had stood almost unchanged since 1825. Following an outbreak of violence in connection with a dispute at Sheffield,
and a series of court decisions which struck afresh at the legality of the unions, a Royal Commission on Trade Unions was appointed in 1867 to enquire into trade union organization and the methods of intimidation the unions were alleged to use.

It was a crucial time, and the unions banded together to defend their rights before the Commission and in a public campaign at the 1868 election, when the town workers voted for the first time. As a result of this and a further enquiry in 1875, a number of Acts were passed between 1868 and 1876, including the Trade Union Act, 1871. These measures defined the legal status and powers of trade unions, and provided machinery for registration of the unions, and were far more favourable to the workers than the employers would have liked. Trade unions, collective bargaining and its necessary methods were at last fairly recognized by the State, although many legal struggles were still to come.

The unions were gaining strength in membership and organization and they enjoyed great prosperity between 1869 and 1874. New unions of less skilled workers were founded, and the organization of agricultural workers was undertaken afresh by Joseph Arch in 1872. The unions, especially in agriculture, were hit badly by the trade depression which continued with only a short break from 1875 to 1889, during which period changes of thought were germinating. There had been a lack of unified leadership for some years since the decline of the "Junta," and a reaction from the slow and steady progress since 1850 and dissatisfaction with the increasingly conciliatory policy of the "old unionism" in a world of growing commercial rivalries and financial consolidation, now began to show itself in a revival of the socialistic spirit. Socialism now meant to its trade union converts not a fanciful Utopia, but practical reforms attainable through the workers' growing political power. It may be noted that the first trade unionist members sat in the House of Commons in 1874.

The New Unionism

The spread of Socialistic ideas coincided after 1885 with the rise of trade unionism among unskilled workers and the revival
of the miners' unions. The older unions had been of craftsmen and skilled workers who paid high contributions and were all well provided for in trade and friendly benefits. The "new unionism" was the mass organization of general labour unions whose members, having little to lose and much to gain, rallied to a militant policy. The great Dock Strike led by Ben Tillett and the successful organization of the gasworkers by Will Thorne were a turning point. They established trade unionism as a civic right of labour, and gave a general impetus to trade union enrolment, the number of trade unionists being doubled between 1888 and 1892.

The influence of the new unions was soon felt, and in 1890 the T.U.C. adopted a programme of Socialistic resolutions and a demand for the eight-hour day. Congress reacted from this progressive political policy for a time, and cut off the direct affiliation of Trades Councils which had supplied the militant element, but there was again a Socialist majority by 1899. The alliance of the trade unions and the political societies at length produced the Labour Representation Committee which, after 1900, led to the formation of the Labour Party as an independent working-class political party, with substantial representation in Parliament after the 1906 election. Congress itself was still largely concerned with political questions, and it was not until after the war of 1914-18 that it became an effective coordinating body on industrial matters. Trade union membership declined during the depression of the early '90's, but recovered as trade improved, and in 1900 there were nearly two million trade unionists.

1900 to the War of 1914-18

Despite the growing competition of Germany and America in the world's markets and the raising of trade barriers, trade and employment prospered during this period, the value of British exports increasing from £291,000,000 in 1900 to £525,000,000 in 1913, but whereas real wages had risen even during the long depression of the '70's and '80's, there were
indications after 1900 that money wages were lagging behind the rise in prices. Employers who, because of competition, were working on narrower margins, offered a greater resistance to trade union demands, and this was met by increasing political activity and the strengthening of trade union organization. After 1909 large-scale strikes in the cotton and mining industries and national lockouts by employers showed a growing unrest among the workers. National strikes of seamen, dockers and transport workers took place in 1911, and in the same year the railwaymen won a great victory by a national stoppage. In 1913 amalgamation followed and produced the National Union of Railwaymen, which embodied the new principle of industrial unionism. This period saw the rise of the great federations in printing, engineering and shipbuilding, mining and transport, and the organization of distributive and farm workers and civil servants.

The response of the trade unions, both in the industrial and the political field, to the threatened deterioration of working-class living standards was delayed for a time by adverse decisions in the Courts. First, the Taff Vale Judgment of 1901 gave a shock to trade union status by declaring that a union could be sued and its funds drawn on for damages as a result of unlawful action by its officials or members in industrial disputes. The Trade Disputes Act of 1906 removed this liability, and among other changes legalized inducement to breach of contract and peaceful picketing in pursuance of a trade dispute. While the Taff Vale decision stood, it made the unions hesitate to enter upon any forward movement, but at the same time it increased their faith in political action. Second, the political power of the unions was threatened by the Osborne Judgment of 1910, which denied unions the right to spend their funds on political objects. This would have crippled the Labour Party, which relied on the unions for financial support, and strong agitation secured the reversal of this principle by the Trade Union Act of 1913. This Act, however, laid down the conditions that inclusion of political objects in the rules of a trade union must be approved by a ballot vote of the members, that the political fund must be kept separately, and that members
were free to "contract out" of contributing to the fund without suffering any disadvantage.

The closing years of this period produced a number of measures of social and industrial legislation, including the establishment of the National Health Insurance and Trade Boards systems and improvements in factory legislation, and considerable progress was made in the provision of voluntary machinery for negotiation and settlement of disputes.

RECOMMENDED READING

"History of Trade Unionism," S. and B. Webb (Chapters 4-9)
"Labour Legislation, Labour Movements and Labour Leaders," George Howell (particularly Volume I, Chapters 18-21)
"History of Labour Representation," A. W. Humphrey (particularly Chapters 2, 5, and 8-11)
"Short History of the British Working-Class Movement," G. D. H. Cole (Volume II, Chapters 3-10; Volume III, Chapters 1-5)
"Legal History of Trade Unionism," Hedges and Winterbottom (Chapter 5)

NOTES
5 THE WAR OF 1914-18

The war period is marked mainly by two features. Firstly, there was an immense growth in the membership of unions, from 1,260 unions with an aggregate membership of just over four millions in 1914, to 1,384 unions with over 8½ millions in 1920. Second, the unions were brought into more intimate contact than ever before with the conduct of industry. An industrial truce was declared at the outbreak of war and, on a guarantee that full rights would be restored with the peace, the unions agreed to suspend certain practices which might have limited production. Compulsory arbitration was agreed to on the Government’s undertaking to limit profits, but there were many unofficial strikes encouraged by the shortage of labour and to some extent inspired by ideas of workers’ control in industry. Unions and employers had equal representation on the Industrial Control Boards, and the organization of workers into the unions was encouraged by the Government.

Conciliation machinery had been provided by the Munitions of War Acts and was encouraged by the report of the Whitley Inquiry in 1917. This was followed by an extension of the Trade Boards system and the formation of Joint Industrial Councils in a number of industries for the consideration of a wide range of industrial problems.

RECOMMENDED READING

“History of Trade Unionism,” S. and B. Webb (Chapters 10 and 11)

“Trade Union Documents,” W. Milne-Bailey (Introduction, pages 30-33)

“Labour Year Book,” 1916 and 1919


Unrest and Repression

Immediately after the war there was great optimism as to the chances of social reconstruction, and, indeed, some permanent gains, such as reduced working hours and an extended system of unemployment insurance, accrued. But an insufficiently controlled return to a peace economy produced grave industrial and social dislocation, and the depression which succeeded the violent postwar boom in 1920 brought disillusionment. As unemployment rose, and attacks were made on wages, industrial strife began again with the railway strike in 1919 and the engineering lockout in 1922. Even after the slump, the staple industries found themselves permanently affected by the loss of export trade and changes in demand, and were unable to share in the full in the subsequent world recovery. Except for brief intervals, the older industries were depressed throughout the '20's, and although trades serving the home market and new industries were more prosperous, in the country as a whole unemployment fell little below 10 per cent at any time.

The miners were the hardest hit by depression, and four Government Inquiries up to 1925 sought for a solution for this industry. In 1926, in reply to drastic wage cuts announced by the mineowners, the National Strike took place to support the locked-out miners. The Government retaliated to this show of strength with the Trade Disputes and Trade Unions Act of 1927, which made a sympathetic strike for the purpose of coercing the Government illegal, and applied similarly to lockouts; severed the connection of the Civil Service organizations with other trade unions; and imposed restrictions on the unions' political activities and their conduct of trade disputes.

The Movement Towards Closer Unity

During this time many trade unions had taken on their present form, as some of the loose federations were replaced by more compact and centralized organizations. These
included the Amalgamated Engineering Union, the Transport and General Workers’ Union, the National Union of General and Municipal Workers, the National Union of Textile Workers, the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation, the Amalgamated Union of Building Trade Workers, and the Union of Post Office Workers. At the same time, trade union organization spread into new fields embracing public employees and professional workers.

From 1920 the Trades Union Congress and its General Council developed into a central co-ordinating body representing the whole Trade Union Movement and entitled to speak for organized labour. The annual or special meetings of Congress laid down lines of general policy, and a well-equipped administrative machine was developed to carry out this policy during the year, and to keep in constant touch with the wide range of subjects in which the Movement is interested. Relations with the Labour Party grew closer with the setting up of the National Council of Labour, on which are represented the General Council of the Trades Union Congress, the Labour Party’s National Executive, the Parliamentary Labour Party and the Co-operative Union. Industrial relations assumed a national scale with the joint discussions between the National Confederation of Employers’ Organizations, the Federation of British Industries and the T.U.C. General Council in 1928-29. In the international field Trade Union relations were strengthened by the work of the International Labour Office at Geneva and the re-organization of the International Federation of Trade Unions.

In Depression and Recovery

After 1929, the whole Trade Union Movement was on the defensive against the widespread wage cuts and unemployment of the period of trade depression and the “national economy” measures of the so-called National Government. The older industries, relying largely on exports—mining, textiles, shipbuilding and engineering—took the hardest blow, while the distributive and semi-luxury trades were less affected. Unemployment produced a fall in trade union membership which
weakened the workers’ resistance to lowered standards. Trade and employment improved at a moderate rate from 1933 to 1937, and subsequently the effects of a fresh depression were offset by re-armament. With the revival came a new advance on the part of the trade unions, and before the war wage increases were taking place on a wide front. The aggregate membership of trade unions which had fallen to 4½ millions in 1932-33, rose from 1934 onwards, and with over 6 millions in 1938 was at a higher level than in any year since 1921. Women trade unionists accounted for almost one-sixth of the total membership before the war.

RECOMMENDED READING


“Short History of the British Working-Class Movement,”
G. D. H. Cole (Volume III, Chapters 7-10)

“British Trade Unionism Today,” G. D. H. Cole and others
(Parts II and III, and, for particular trades, Part IV)

“Organized Labour in Four Continents,” H. A. Marquand and others (Chapter on Great Britain).

NOTES
Problems of a War Economy

The chances and changes of war created social and economic problems of the greatest difficulty. Unemployment gave place to an acute shortage of labour. It was necessary to mobilize manpower and material resources for war industry as well as for the services, and from the middle of 1940 a great intensification of effort was called for. In order to make the fullest use of the nation's resources, it was imperative to curtail civil production and release labour for transfer to essential work. The inflow of women and untrained men into war industry involved questions of dilution, training, rates of pay and welfare. In all the essential industries and services, there was the need to maximize production, and to avoid loss of output due to waste and inefficiency in framing and executing production programmes or to industrial disputes or labour unrest. It was no less vital to the success of the war effort that costs and prices should not get out of hand, and that essential civilian goods should be adequately available and equitably distributed.

The Role of the Trade Unions in Wartime

These and other wartime needs could not be secured without far-reaching measures of State control, which, in the absence of safeguards of the interests of workpeople as producers and consumers, might have irretrievably undermined their democratic rights and standards. The Trade Union Movement, in assenting to and co-operating in whatever measures were necessary for the most effective prosecution of the war, made clear that it did so voluntarily, while maintaining independent Trade Union organization and its freedom to protect and further the well-being of its members and their families. From the start, organized labour insisted on its right to be consulted in all matters concerning its interests, not only so that those interests might be represented, but also so that the experience and resource of the workpeople and their unions should be freely drawn upon in the conduct of the war. So varied are the
matters with which the trade unions are concerned, and so pervasive was the war effort in its reactions on every phase of industrial and social life, that the trade unions came to be associated with the formulation and execution of policy in virtually every aspect of the war, save the purely military, and were represented, along with organizations of employers, on a great variety of consultative or administrative bodies at every level of the war organization. By these means, they were able to minimize the friction and conflict which would otherwise have accompanied the conscription, direction and control of industrial labour, the relaxation of peacetime trade union practices and of statutory regulations of working conditions, and other necessary re-adjustments, and to play a part in the development of schemes, such as rationing and price regulation, which helped to spread the burden of sacrifice. Moreover, they took no small part in efforts by which many of the labour controls were made to yield to the affected workers compensatory advantages, such as a guaranteed week, greater security of tenure of employment, welfare provision in and out of the factory, and, through Joint Production Committees and other means, developments in employer-worker consultation.

Effective measures were taken, from 1940, to avoid strikes and lockouts, but there was no rigid control of wages, and as far as possible the principle of voluntary settlement was maintained. Wages continued to be determined by negotiation between the parties, and when machinery was provided in the National Arbitration Tribunal for compulsory arbitration, it was stipulated that disputes were only to be referred to this tribunal where they could not be adjusted by joint negotiation or by an agreed reference to voluntary arbitration. Further, it was made obligatory upon employers in any district to observe terms and conditions not less favourable than those which had been settled by collective agreement or by arbitration for the industry concerned in that district. The real safeguard against an inflationary rise in war wages and loss of output through stoppages was the moderation shown by the trade unions in their wage claims and their ability to secure the adherence of workpeople to wage settlements.
Reconstruction Planning

When the time came to look ahead to the tasks of postwar reconstruction and the transition to peace, the Trade Union Movement, in addition to working out its own proposals, became represented on the various bodies charged with advising the Government on these matters, and after the war, particularly in connection with the plans for increasing production, trade union participation remained at least as prominent a feature of administration as it was during the war.

The formation of the first Labour majority government in 1945 quickly brought to fruition important legislative changes for which the Trade Union Movement had long been striving—notably the total repeal of the Trade Disputes and Trade Unions Act of 1927; the institution of comprehensive schemes of social insurance and a national health service; and measures bringing into public ownership the coal-mining industry and the Bank of England. Bills for the nationalization of transport and electricity supply undertakings and other basic services are under consideration or in preparation. As the field of public control over industry and trade widens, ever-increasing responsibilities are laid upon representatives of the workpeople who, whether in an executive or an advisory capacity, contribute to the formation and application of economic policy. Among the latest developments in trade union participation in public control, which will be watched with the closest interest, is the representation of labour in the administration of nationalized industries, and upon the various working parties set up to report upon means of increasing efficiency in private industries. Prominent among the improvements in working conditions for which the Trade Union Movement is pressing are the establishment of the 40-hour working week without reduction in pay, and the provision of holidays with pay for all workers.

During the war, aggregate trade union membership rose from a little over six millions at the end of 1938 to a peak of over eight millions at the end of 1943; the number of women members doubled during the same period and accounted for one-fifth of the total at the later date. There was a noticeable
tendency towards closer unity of organization and policy, which was assisted by further amalgamation and by federation and the use of co-ordinating committees, and a growing confidence in the leadership of the T.U.C. and its General Council.

The war inevitably interfered with the contacts of British Trade Unionism with the Trade Union Movements of other countries, but not all ties were severed. By means of the Anglo-French Trade Union Advisory Council, connection was maintained with the French Trade Union Movement until the fall of France. Subsequently the General Council of the T.U.C. kept in close touch with the Trade Unions of the U.S.A., the Commonwealth and Soviet Russia. Means of co-operation with the Soviet Trade Unions were strengthened by the establishment of an Anglo-Soviet Trade Union Committee in 1941. Attempts were made, but without success, to extend the Committee to include representatives of the American Labour Movement. The importance attached by British Labour to the renewal and strengthening of international collaboration was shown by its part in the success of the World Trade Union Conference in London in February, 1945, and the subsequent formation of the World Federation of Trade Unions, as well as by its efforts to assist the resuscitation of trade unions on the Continent and to foster trade unions and improved labour and social standards in the British Commonwealth overseas, and by its active support for the work of the International Labour Organization.

RECOMMENDED READING

"Organized Labour in the War," J. Price
"British Trade Unions," J. Price
"Industrial Relations Handbook," with bibliography of official publications (Ministry of Labour, 1944)
T.U.C. Annual Reports, 1939 to 1946
"What the T.U.C. Is Doing."
BOOKS RECOMMENDED IN THE TEXT


**TRADE UNION DOCUMENTS**, W. Milne-Bailey. (*Bell*, 1928.)

**LABOUR LEGISLATION, LABOUR MOVEMENTS AND LABOUR LEADERS**, G. Howell. (*T. Fisher Unwin.*)


**LEGAL HISTORY OF TRADE UNIONISM**, Hedges and Winterbottom. (*Longmans Green*, 1930.)


**THE CHARTIST MOVEMENT**, Mark Hovell. (*Longmans.*)

**HISTORY OF LABOUR REPRESENTATION**, A. W. Humphrey. (*Constable.*)

**LABOUR YEAR BOOK, 1916 and 1919.** (*Labour Party.*)


**ORGANIZED LABOUR IN FOUR CONTINENTS**, H. A. Marquand and others. (*Longmans Green*, 1939.)


**BRITISH TRADE UNIONS**, J. Price. (*Longmans*, 1942.)

**INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS HANDBOOK.** (*Ministry of Labour and National Service, His Majesty's Stationery Office*, 1944.)

RECOMMENDED GENERAL READING ON INDUSTRIAL AND SOCIAL HISTORY

**INDUSTRIAL DEMOCRACY**, S. and B. Webb. (*Longmans Green*, 1920.)

**THE VILLAGE LABOURER, 1760-1832**, J. L. and Barbara Hammond. (*Longmans Green*, 1927.)
THE TOWN LABOURER, 1760-1832, J. L. and Barbara Hammond. (Longmans Green, 1925.)

THE SKILLED LABOURER, 1760-1832, J. L. and Barbara Hammond. (Longmans Green, 1927.)

THE MARTYRS OF TOLPUDDLE. (T.U.C., 1934.)

THE RISE OF MODERN INDUSTRY, J. L. and B. Hammond. (Methuen, 1925.)

LIFE OF SHAFTESBURY, J. L. and B. Hammond. (Constable.) (Penguin Books.)

LIFE OF FRANCIS PLACE, Graham Wallas. (Allen & Unwin.)

AN ECONOMIC HISTORY OF MODERN BRITAIN, J. H. Clapham. (Cambridge University Press.)

Vol. 1. The Early Railway Age, 1820-1850.

HISTORY OF SOCIALISM, Max Beer. (Bell, 2 vols.)

SEVENTY YEARS OF TRADE UNIONISM. (T.U.C., 1938.)


TRADE UNIONISM, C. M. Lloyd. (Black, 1928.)

INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS IN GREAT BRITAIN, J. H. Richardson. (I.L.O., through P. S. King, London, 1938.)

TRADE UNIONS FIGHT—FOR WHAT? Herbert Tracey. (Routledge, 1940.)

BRITISH TRADE UNIONS, Sir Walter Citrine. (Britain in Pictures Series, Collins, 1942.)


BRITISH JOINT PRODUCTION MACHINERY. (I.L.O., through P. S. King, London, 1944.)

THE INTERNATIONAL LABOUR MOVEMENT, J. Price. (Oxford University Press, 1945.)

T.U.C. ANNUAL REPORTS. (T.U.C.)

WHAT THE T.U.C. IS DOING. (T.U.C.)

LABOUR. (Monthly: Official organ of the T.U.C.)

TRADE UNION JOURNALS.
PUBLISHED BY TRADES UNION CONGRESS
Transport House, Smith Square, London, S.W. 1
and printed by The Victoria House Printing Co., Ltd.
(T.U. all Depts.).
Ref. S.B.T.U.2/47
In the pages of LABOUR

T.U.C. OFFICIAL MONTHLY JOURNAL

you will find a concentration on vital facts

summaries of Government Reports
and inquiries
and of new legislation;
details of wage movements
and industrial awards;
authentic accounts of
international developments
and of Congress policy

FOURPENCE a copy (post free); 1 year, 3s. 6d.
from T.U.C. Publications Department,
Transport House, Smith Square, London, S.W.1