

Shop Committee Idea Is Winning Recognition In Over 250 Plants of U. S.

Plan Misunderstood by Workers in Some Places and Is Looked Upon With Suspicion—Applies Democracy to Operation of Factories—Long Accepted in Great Britain—Labor Made a Partner.

By RAY STANNARD BAKER. ARTICLE XIV.

Here is a significant observation quoted, not from a labor leader, nor yet from a radical reformer, but from an American steelmaker, who is also a great employer of labor: "The real leader in industry today is not the man who substitutes his own will and his own brain for the will and intelligence of the crowd, but the one who releases the energies within the crowd so that the will of the crowd can be expressed."

Charles M. Schwab has also said: "I know something about making steel, but I don't know anything near as much as the thousands of steel workers." His view corresponds closely with that of the foremost thinkers upon industrial reconstruction both here and in Europe, and that is that there are vast undeveloped resources of knowledge, energy and creative genius in the human factor in industry, and that the next great step forward in civilization will consist in releasing this knowledge, energy.

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genius of the great masses of the workers.

"Hire and Fire." Under the old autocratic regime in industry there have been specialists in financing, in selling, in advertising, in technical processes; but the last thing of all to be considered is the human factor, the labor. Any foreman or boss could "hire and fire." It is only very recently that labor experts, labor managers, labor engineers have begun to appear as an essential factor in industrial organization, and in only a few of the more enlightened industries has the labor expert risen to anything like an equality of status with the other departmental chiefs. I know of only a few cases in which labor management is dignified by a vice presidency or other high official recognition in the company.

Under the old autocratic regime everything is directed from above, according to the will of the employer or manager, and the tendency is toward the suppression of every form of creative energy on the part of labor. The United States Steel Corporation is today the greatest American example of this system.

Applying Democracy. Fortunately, not only in the steel industry but in many others as well, the new secret for releasing more fully the energies of human beings is now being discovered and developed. The idea is spreading with extraordinary rapidity both in America and in Europe. It is not confined to thoughtful labor leaders nor to students or experts in industrial management, but many employers and employers' associations are, as one observer said to me, "riddled with it."

And this "secret" consists in applying to industry, life by life, the simple machine of democracy. "We do not need a revolution," said H. L. Gantt, one of the true pioneers of the movement, "we do not need a class war. Most people will work for the common good if you give them a chance. The trouble is that we have been clinging to an autocratic system under the mistaken idea that it was good, at least for the autocrat. The fact is that it isn't. Democracy is far better for all of us. Industrial democracy will release our energies and make us the strongest people on earth."

250 Plants Try Idea. I described in my last article how this new system had been introduced and showed how it worked in a typical industry. Today there are over 250 mills, factories and other business organizations all the way from huge steel plants like the Colorado Fuel & Iron company, the Midvale Steel company and important transportation and shipbuilding companies to little factories with a few hundred hands, where the new idea is being tried out. It is a very new movement. Before the war it was practically unknown outside of a few halting pioneer experiments; today, it is scarcely an exaggeration to say that it is more the thought of American industrial leadership than any other single group of ideas.

Accepted in Great Britain. Mr. Gantt predicted that its introduction would make us "the strongest people on earth"—but we shall have to push hard indeed if we beat

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the British and the Germans. For the British have already gone beyond us, through the adoption of a national policy of the Whitley Councils system providing for the reconstruction of industry upon a democratic basis. While a large proportion of our employers and labor leaders, through lack of understanding, is still opposing the whole idea, a large proportion of both organized capital and organized labor in Great Britain has accepted it. Already 41 national industries, including many hundreds of individual plants employing over 2,500,000 workers, are operating under the new system.

The Germans have sought the same end in their methodical and formal way by passing on January 17 of this year, a "shops council" law which will apply to all factories or plants where "more than five men or women are employed." It is called "one of the most radical pieces of economic legislation since the war." It means the gradual reconstruction of German industry upon a co-operative and democratic basis.

Compared with the sweeping changes contemplated in both Great Britain and Germany—our economic competitors—the American movement is still tentative and experimental. Although more than 250 separate enterprises are trying out the system, this represents a very small proportion of the tens of thousands of employing establishments in America. It is as yet a mere crack in the surface of the old system.

"Get Together Spirit." The new method was adopted wholeheartedly during the war by our own War Labor Board, and through that organization applied in many industries where labor disturbances were threatening great concerns, like the General Electric company at its Pittsfield and Lynn plants, the Bethlehem Steel corporation, the American Cash Register company, and several important plants at Bridgeport, Conn. And the President's Industrial Commission, now at Washington, is likely to recommend the adoption of the new system as one of the main features of its report. There is this to be said about Americans—they are quick learners, and once they understand the enormous possibilities of industrial democracy, there is no doubt that the new system will be swiftly applied. The atmosphere of American life is peculiarly favorable to the growth of such democratic movements, and we have already demonstrated during the war an extraordinary ability to "get together" to infuse industry with a spirit of co-operation and to accomplish great results in a short time.

Many "System" Here. De Toqueville long ago called attention to the peculiar genius of Americans for forming associations of all kinds, for all purposes—in short, their ability to work together. "Wherever at the head of some new undertaking you see the government in France or a man of rank in England, in the United States you will be sure to find an association." The English often perform great things singly, whereas the Americans form associations for the smallest undertakings.

The American approach to the new system is by the American method, through encouragement by volunteer associations and experimentation in actual enterprises. It desires to maintain a German system prescribed by law or a British system carefully studied by a governmental body and adopted from above, but what it loses in uniformity it may gain through variety of creative experimentation; the attempt by many individual brains to apply the principle to specific cases. This method cannot fail to produce a greater degree of flexibility and closer adaptation to actual needs than any prepared plan. The creative impulse thrives best where experimentation is freest.

So it is that when we endeavor in America to define exactly what the new system of "industrial democracy" really is, we find a large number of different "plans" or "systems," varying widely in detail and still more widely in spirit. We have the Colorado Fuel and Iron plan, the Bridgeport plan, the Leitch plan, the Amalgamated Garment Workers' plan and others, and as yet no comprehensive governmental plan at all. It is a movement which has grown more or less spontaneously from within.

Now, I shall not enter here into a discussion of the details of these various plans. I have illustrated in a former article exactly how the system was applied in one small industry, but there are certain broad general principles which underlie the entire movement. Fundamental to the effort is to do away gradually with the old autocratic and militaristic organization of industry, and substitute for it a new co-operative and democratic organization.

Labor a Partner Under Plan. Under the new system labor is no longer regarded as a mere part of the machinery, but as a partner with a definite share in the management. The essential structure is very simple. It consists of committees secretly elected by the workmen of a shop or an industry (hence the names "shop committee" or "employees' representatives") to meet similar committees appointed by the

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management, thus producing a "works council" or "trade board" to discuss and settle certain of the problems of management—beginning with the problems especially affecting labor—working conditions, wages, hours and the like. One vital purpose of the movement is to reach and deal with the causes of unrest, and never to permit disagreements to develop to the point of open war (strikes). It may be a very crude and partial arrangement in which only a little democracy is let into the industry, and only very limited powers conferred upon the "council," or it may go to the length of admitting a representative of the workers to a place in the board of directors of the company, with extensive privileges of sharing in the profits and of purchasing stock in the corporation—as in the example at Wappingers Falls, which I have already described. All of the experiments represent an approach to "industrial democracy." Those who wish to go into the whole matter more fully—and there is a notable awakening of interest in this subject all over America—may find further information in certain books and reports; or, better yet, by visiting some plant where the system is now in operation. The subject is as yet so very new, and the developments are so rapid, that the literature is rather unsatisfactory. Two new books which interpret the spirit of the movement are "Industrial Good Will" by Prof. John R. Commons of Wisconsin University, one of the best of our American authorities, and "Industry and Humanity," by W. L. Mackenzie King, former minister of labor of Canada. For a more detailed account of actual plans in operation there is a report on "Shop Committee and Industrial Councils," published by the New Jersey State Chamber of Commerce, Newark, N. J., and a summary, "Works Councils in the United States," by the national industrial conference board, 15 Beacon street, Boston. This latter is a report made under the direction of 25 of the foremost employers' associations of America. Other reports may be obtained from the United States Department of Labor; and there is a small book by W. L. Stoddard upon the experience of the war labor board in establishing shop committees.

Much Opposition Here. Much opposition to the new system in America is to be found among both employers and employees. Upon the side of the employers it is due in part to the natural inertia of men who have succeeded by the old method, who know that method well, and are fearful of any change or new adventure, in part to the human desire to maintain "authority," and in part to the short-sightedness that sees more immediate profit in the present system. It is so much easier to "boss" than to co-operate. And the new system looks like revolution! Many employers will examine it with interest, but they will not give up the hard punishment of strikes or other labor disturbances. It is among the younger, more progres-

sive, more thoughtful employers that the movement is spreading most rapidly. Since the close of the recent steel strike employers opposed to the plan have called attention to the fact that employees working in companies having the new system (in a more or less rudimentary form) like the Colorado Fuel & Iron company and the Midvale Steel company, went out on strike with the other steel workers. This is true (except as to the Bethlehem Steel company, where the new plan of co-operation and conciliation was largely instrumental in keeping the plant going), but significantly it has not discouraged a single one of these great employers. They are going straight ahead with their forward-looking experiments. As the Iron Age well says in an editorial:

"We have looked upon the steps taken by various steel companies to cultivate better relations with their employees through such committees, on which the employee representatives are chosen by the workers, as having great promise, and we have the same opinion in spite of what happened at these plants in the period of the strike. It need hardly be said that the defeat of the steel strike leaders and the arising of public opinion against them do not signify that there is no call for change in labor conditions in the steel industry. The fact that so many workers in the production of steel are of foreign birth makes all the more necessary the employment of extraordinary means by the employers to establish a relation of confidence. The problem is neither more nor less than that of realizing throughout the industry the same democracy that was urged as the goal of every united effort of managers and men during the war. We believe the employee representation plan is the best means yet devised for reaching the desired end."

Misunderstood By Workers. On the part of the workers the opposition to the new idea is also due to fear and misunderstanding—especially among the older and more conservative leaders of the Gompers type. They have built up their labor organization upon a militaristic basis; they regard the employer more or less as a natural enemy upon whom from time to time they make war (strike) and with whom they sign truces (collective bargains). It is as hard for them to get the new idea of frank co-operation and a democratic relationship as it is for the old-fashioned employers. And they really have a genuine basis for their apprehension; for in some cases the new device of shop organizations, so-called "company unions," has been deliberately used by employers for hampering labor organization or weakening its influence. The workers know what an irresponsible untruster labor organization has been in time in getting even the primary recognition of their rights, and they dread desperately anything which suggests interference

with their free action in this regard. They are very suspicious of certain of the "company unions" in the steel industry; indeed, one of their demands when the steel strike was called was the "abolition of company unions."

Good Will Spirit. The only secure approach to the new system is a genuine spirit of good-will, firmly based upon a scientific examination of all the factors in the problem. Any employer who "takes on" the "shop committee" or "employees' representation" system merely as a sop to labor or with the intention of using it to fight unionism or to postpone doing real justice to the workers is doomed to failure. He discredits the whole idea, in the spirit of approach is the essential element. If he wants to reap the benefits of industrial democracy he must begin by being democratic; if he wants genuine co-operation he must himself genuinely co-operate. In England the Whitley plan of workers' councils presupposes complete organization of labor; and labor must never be expected to forgo the full use of its one weapon of defense—organization and the strike—unless it is thoroughly convinced that capital and management is sincere in its profers of co-operation and conciliation, and honestly proposes to introduce a greater degree of democracy in management.

Two Children Run Over by Automobile Escape With Bruises

Two little girls, each aged 5, had narrow escapes from death on their way home from kindergarten school Tuesday afternoon when run over by a Thirty-fifth and Hamilton streets by an automobile driven by Mrs. H. T. Landeryou, Florence Heights.

It was the first day at school for one of the children, Margaret Jean Phalen, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. P. J. Phalen, 3225 Myrtle avenue. She was accompanied by Ruth Taylor, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. W. H. Taylor, 3230 Myrtle avenue. Both children were knocked down, but they fell between the wheels of the machine, which inflicted severe bruises only. Police exonerated Mrs. Landeryou.

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