

CHAPTER XII: THE PROBLEM OF THE TRADE-UNIONS

Owing to the rapid growth of the movement, we felt compelled in 1922 to take a definite stand on a question which has not been fully solved even yet.

In our efforts to discover the quickest and easiest way for the Movement to reach the heart of the broad masses, we were always confronted with the objection that the worker could never completely belong to us while his interests in the purely vocational and economic sphere were cared for by a political organisation conducted by men whose principles were quite different from ours.

That was quite a serious objection. The general belief was that a workman engaged in some trade or calling could not exist if he did not belong to a trade-union.

Not only were his professional interests thus protected, but his position in the factory or concern, would, in the long run, have become untenable, if he were not a member of a trade-union.

The majority of the workers belonged to trade-unions. Generally speaking, the unions had conducted successfully the battle for the establishment of a definite scale of wages and had concluded agreements which guaranteed the worker a steady income.

Undoubtedly, all workers benefited by the results of that campaign and, for honest men especially, conflicts of conscience must have arisen if they took the wages which had been assured through the struggle fought by the trade-unions and at the same time refrained from taking part in the fight.

It was difficult to discuss this problem with the average bourgeois employer. He had no understanding (or did not wish to have any) for either the material or moral side of the question.

Finally, his own supposed economic interests were, on principle, opposed to every kind of organisation which united the workmen that were dependent on him. Hence it was for the most part impossible to bring these bourgeois employers to take an impartial view of the situation.

Here, therefore, as in so many other cases, it was necessary to appeal to disinterested outsiders who would not be liable to fix their attention on the trees and fail to see the forest.

With a little goodwill on their part, they could readily understand a state of affairs which is of the highest importance for our present and future existence.

In the first volume of this book I have already expressed my views on the nature, purpose and necessity of trade-unions. There I adopted the standpoint that, unless measures are undertaken by the State (usually futile in such cases) or a new ideal is introduced in our education, which would change the attitude of the employer towards the worker, no other course will be open to the latter, except to defend his own interests himself by claiming his equal rights as a contracting party within the economic sphere of the nation's existence.

I stated further that this would conform to the ideal of a national community, if thereby social injustices could be redressed which would otherwise cause serious damage to the whole social structure.

I stated, moreover, that the worker would always find it necessary to undertake this protective action as long as there were men among the employers who had no sense of their social obligations or even of the most elementary human rights, whilst I concluded by saying, that, if such self-defence be considered necessary, its form ought to be that of an association made up of the workers themselves on the basis of trade-unions.

This was my general idea and it remained the same in 1922, but a clear and precise formula was still to be discovered. We could not be satisfied with merely understanding the problem; it was necessary to come to some conclusions that could be put into practice.

The following questions had to be answered:

(1) Are trade-unions necessary?

(2) Should the National Socialist German Labour Party itself operate on a trade-unionist basis or have its members take part in trade-unionist activities in some form or other?

(3) What form should a National Socialist trade-union take? What are the tasks confronting us and the ends we must try to attain?

(4) How can we establish trade-unions for such tasks and aims?

I think that I have already answered the first question adequately. In the present state of affairs I am convinced that we cannot possibly dispense with the trade-unions. On the contrary, they are among the most important institutions in the economic life of the nation.

Not only are they important in the sphere of social policy but also, and even more so, in the national political sphere, for, when the great masses of a nation see their vital needs satisfied through a just trade-unionist movement, which is at the same time educating them, the stamina of the whole nation in its struggle for existence will be enormously reinforced thereby. Above all, the trade-unions are necessary as building stones for the future economic parliament, which will be made up of chambers representing the various professions and occupations.

The second question is also easy to answer. If the trade-unionist movement is important, then it is clear that National Socialism ought to take a definite stand on that question, not only theoretically, but also in practice. But how? That is more difficult to decide.

The National Socialist Movement, which aims at establishing the National Socialist *völkisch* State, must always bear in mind the principle that every future institution under that State must be evolved from the Movement itself.

It is a great mistake to believe that, by the mere acquisition of supreme political power, we can suddenly bring about a definite reorganisation, from nothing, without the help of a certain reserve of men who have been trained beforehand, especially in the spirit of the Movement.

Here, also, the principle holds good that the spirit is always more important than the external form which it animates, since this form can be created mechanically and quickly.

For instance, the leadership principle may be imposed on an organised political community in a dictatorial way. But, this principle can become a living reality only when, by means of a gradual process of development from an extremely small nucleus, and by that process of elimination which the hard realities of life continually enforce, there is produced, after the lapse of years, the necessary material from which leaders, capable of carrying the principle

into practical effect, are chosen.

It is out of the question to think that a scheme for the constitution of a State can be pulled out of a portfolio at a moment's notice and 'introduced' by imperative orders from above.

One may try that kind of thing, but the result will always be something that cannot endure, and may even prove abortive.

This calls to mind the origin of the Weimar Constitution and the attempt to impose on the German people a new constitution and a new flag, neither of which had any inner relation to the vicissitudes of our nation's history during the last half century.

The National Socialist State must guard against all such experiments. It can only grow out of an organisation which has already existed for a long time.

This organisation must be in itself the essence of National Socialist life, so that finally it may be able to establish a National Socialist State which will be a living reality.

As I have already said the germ-cells of the economic chambers must be established in the various vocational representative bodies and especially in the trade-unions. If this subsequent vocational representation and the central economic parliament are to be National Socialist institutions, these important germ-cells must be vehicles of the National Socialist ideology.

The institutions of the Movement must be transferred to the State; but the State cannot call into existence all of a sudden and as if by magic, corresponding organisations unless these are to remain completely lifeless.

Looking at the matter from the highest standpoint, the National Socialist Movement will have to recognise the necessity for instituting its own trade-unionist activities.

It must do so for a further reason, namely, because a real National Socialist education for the employer as well as for the employee, in the spirit of mutual co-operation within the common framework of the national community, cannot be secured by theoretical instruction, appeals and exhortations, but only through the struggle of daily life.

In and through this struggle the Movement must educate the several large

economic groups and bring them closer to one another through a wider outlook. Without this preparatory work it would be sheer illusion to hope that a real national community could be brought into existence.

Only the great *Weltanschauung* for which the Movement is fighting can serve to form by degrees that general attitude which the new era will one day prove to be internally and fundamentally sound and not mere outward show.

Hence, the Movement must not only adopt a positive attitude towards the trade-unionist idea, it must go further; it must, by means of practical activity, provide the multitude of its members and adherents with the education requisite for the future National Socialist State.

The answer to the third question follows from what has already been said. The National Socialist trade-union is not an instrument for class warfare, but a representative organ of the various professions and callings.

The National Socialist State recognises no 'classes' but, from the political point of view, only citizens with absolutely equal rights and equal obligations corresponding thereto.

Apart from these, it recognises subjects of the State who have no political rights whatsoever.

According to the National Socialist concept, it is not the task of the trade-union to band together certain men within the national community and thus gradually to transform these men into a class, so as to use them in a conflict against other similarly organised groups within the national community.

We certainly cannot assign this task to the trade-union as such. This was the task assigned to it the moment it became a fighting weapon in the hands of the Marxist.

The trade-union is not naturally an instrument of class warfare; but the Marxists transformed it into an instrument for use in their own class struggle.

They created the economic weapon which the international Jew uses for the purpose of destroying the economic foundations of free and independent national States, of ruining their national trade and industry and thereby enslaving free nations to serve Jewish world finance, which transcends all state boundaries.

In contradiction to this, the National Socialist trade-union must organise definite groups of those who participate in the economic life of the nation. They will thus enhance the security of the national economic system, reinforcing it by the elimination of all those anomalies which ultimately exercise a destructive influence on the social body of the nation, damage the vital forces of the national community, prejudice the welfare of the State and, by no means least, bring evil and destruction on economic life itself.

In the hands of the National Socialist trade-union the strike is not, therefore, an instrument for disturbing and dislocating national production, but for increasing it and making it run smoothly, by fighting against all those abuses which, by reason of their non-social character, hinder efficiency in business and thereby hamper the existence of the whole nation.

Individual efficiency is always in direct relation to the general social and legal position of the individual in the economic process, and to the consequent conviction that the economic prosperity of the nation must necessarily redound to the benefit of the individual citizen.

The National Socialist employee will have to recognise the fact that his own material welfare is bound up with the economic prosperity of the nation.

The National Socialist employer must recognise that the welfare and contentment of his employees are necessary prerequisites for the existence and development of his own economic prosperity.

National Socialist workers and employers are both, at one and the same time, the representatives and administrators of the whole national community. The large measure of personal freedom which is accorded to them for their activities is to be explained by the fact that experience has shown that the productive powers of the individual are greater if he is accorded a generous measure of freedom than if he is coerced from above.

Moreover, by according this freedom, we give free play to the natural process of selection which brings forward the ablest, most capable and most industrious.

For the National Socialist trade-union, therefore, the strike is a means that may, and indeed must be, resorted to as long as there is not yet a National Socialist *völkisch* State, but when that State is established it will, as a matter of course, abolish the class struggle between the two great groups made up of

employers and employees respectively. For that is a struggle which has always resulted in lessening national production and injuring the national community.

In place of this struggle, the National Socialist State will undertake the task of caring for and defending the rights of all parties concerned.

It will be the duty of the economic chambers to keep the national economic system in smooth working order and to remove whatever defects or errors may affect it adversely.

Questions which are to-day settled only by the struggle of millions of people will then be settled in the representative chambers of trades and professions and in the central economic parliament.

Thus employers and employees will no longer find themselves drawn into a mutual conflict over wages and hours of work, always to the detriment of the interests of both.

They will solve these problems together before a higher authority, whose sole aim will be to safeguard the welfare of the national community and of the State. Here, as everywhere else, the inflexible principle must hold good that the interests of the country must come before party interests.

The task of the National Socialist trade-union will be to educate and prepare its members to conform to these ideals, namely, that all must work together for the maintenance and security of our nation and its State, each one according to the abilities and powers with which Nature has endowed him and which have been developed and trained by the national community.

Our fourth question was, 'How can we establish trade-unions for such tasks and aims?' It is by far the most difficult to answer.

Generally speaking, it is easier to establish something in new territory than in old territory which already has its established institutions.

It is easy to set up a new business in a district where there is no existing business of the same kind, but it is more difficult if the same kind of enterprise already exists and it is most difficult of all when the conditions are such that only one enterprise of this kind can prosper.

In the latter case, the promoters of the new enterprise find themselves confronted not only with the problem of introducing their own business, but

also that of how to bring about the destruction of the other business already existing in the district, so that the new enterprise may prosper.

It would be senseless to have a National Socialist trade, union side by side with other trade-unions, for the former must be thoroughly imbued with a feeling for the ideological nature of its task and the resulting obligation not to tolerate other similar or hostile institutions.

It must also insist that it alone is necessary, to the exclusion of all the rest. It can come to no arrangement and no compromise with kindred tendencies, but must assert its own absolute and exclusive right to exist.

There were two ways which might have led to such a development:

(1) We could have established our own trade-union and then gradually taken up the fight against the Marxist international trade-unions.

(2) We could have joined the Marxist trade-unions in an attempt to imbue them with a new spirit and, with the idea of transforming them into an instrument in the service of the new ideal. For the following reasons, it would have been inadvisable to choose the first method. Our financial situation was still the cause of much concern to us at that time and our resources were very slender.

The effects of the inflation were steadily spreading and made the situation still more difficult, because at that time the trade-unions were unable to render their members any tangible service.

From this point of view, there was no reason why the individual worker should pay his dues to the union. Even the Marxist unions then existing were on the point of collapse when, as the result of Herr Curio's inspired Ruhr policy, millions suddenly poured into their coffers. This so-called 'national' Chancellor of the Reich should be dubbed the 'saviour' of the Marxist trade-unions.

We could not count on similar financial facilities, and nobody would have felt inclined to join a new trade-union which, on account of its financial weakness, could not offer him the slightest material benefit.

On the other hand, I had to guard against the danger of creating a new organisation of this kind which would only serve to provide 'cushy jobs' for men of little ability.

At that time the question of personnel played a most important role. I did not have a single man whom I could have called upon to carry out this important task.

He who could have succeeded at that time in overthrowing the Marxist unions to make way for the triumph of the National Socialist corporative idea, which would have replaced this weapon of ruinous class warfare, could have been reckoned as one of the very greatest men our country had produced and his bust installed in the Valhalla at Regensburg for the admiration of posterity.

But I knew of no person who could have qualified for such an honour. In this connection we must not be led astray by the fact that the international trade-unions are conducted by men of only mediocre significance. This fact is actually of no importance, for when those unions were founded there was nothing else of a similar kind in existence.

To-day, the National Socialist Movement must fight against a monster organisation which has existed for a long time, and has been carefully thought out to the last detail.

The assailant must always exercise more intelligence than the defender, if he is to overthrow the latter.

The Marxist trade-unionist citadel may be governed to-day by mediocre leaders, but it cannot be taken by assault, except through the dauntless energy and genius of a superior leader on the other side. If such a leader cannot be found it is futile to haggle with Fate and even more foolish to try to make the attempt under a leader wanting in the necessary qualities. Here one must apply the maxim that in life it is often better to leave a thing alone for the time being, rather than try to do it by halves or do it badly, owing to a lack of suitable means.

To this we had to add another consideration, which was not at all of a demagogic character. At that time I had, and I still have to-day, the firmly-rooted conviction that when one is engaged in a great ideological struggle in the political field, it would be a grave mistake to mix up economic questions with this struggle in its earlier stages.

This applies particularly to our German people, because in their case, the economic struggle would immediately divert their energy from the political fight.

Once people are brought to believe that they can buy a little house with their savings they will devote themselves to the task of increasing their savings and no spare time will be left to them for the political struggle against those who, one way or another, intend one day to secure possession of the pennies that have been hoarded.

Instead of participating in the political conflict on behalf of the opinions and convictions which they have been brought to accept, they will now go 'all out' for their 'settlement' idea and in the end they will fall between two stools.

To-day the National Socialist Movement is at the beginning of its struggle. To a great extent it must first of all shape and develop its ideals.

It must employ every ounce of its energy in the struggle to have its great ideals accepted, but this effort will not be crowned with success, unless the combined energies of the Movement be devoted exclusively to this struggle.

To-day we have a classic example of how the militant strength of a people becomes paralysed when that people is too much taken up with purely economic problems.

The Revolution which took place in November 1918, was not brought about by the trade-unions, but was carried out in spite of them, and the German bourgeoisie is not waging a political fight for the future of its country because it believes that that future can be amply secured by constructive work in the economic field.

We must learn as lesson from such phenomena, because in our case the same thing would happen in the same circumstances. The more the combined strength of our Movement is concentrated in the political struggle, the more confidently may we count on being successful along our whole front, but if we busy ourselves prematurely with tradeunionist problems, settlement problems, etc., it will be to the detriment of our cause, taken as a whole.

For, though these problems may be important, they cannot be solved in an adequate manner until we have political power in our hands and are able to use it in the service of these schemes. Until that day comes these problems can have only a paralysing effect on the Movement and if it takes them up too soon they will only be a hindrance in the effort to attain its ideological aims.

It may then easily happen that trade-unionist considerations will decide the political trend of the Movement, instead of the *Weltanschauung* of the

Movement determining the course the trade-unions are to adopt.

The Movement and the nation can derive advantage from a National Socialist trade-unionist organisation, only if the latter be so thoroughly inspired by National Socialist ideas that it runs no danger of falling into step behind the Marxist movement, for a National Socialist trade-union which considered itself only as a competitor against the Marxist unions would be worse than none.

It must declare war against the Marxist trade-union, not only as an organisation but, above all, as an ideal.

It must declare itself hostile to the idea of class and class warfare and, in place of this, it must declare itself the defender of the various vocational and professional interests of the German people.

Considered from all these points of view it was not then advisable, nor is it yet advisable, to think of founding our own trade-union, unless somebody appeared who was obviously called upon by Fate to solve this particular problem.

Therefore, there remained only two possible courses—either to recommend our own party members to leave the trade-unions in which they were enrolled, or to remain in them for the moment, with the idea of disrupting them as much as possible.

In general, I recommended the latter alternative. There could be nothing against this, especially in 1922–1923, since, during the inflation, the financial gain which the trade-unions derived from the few members who belonged to our, as yet, youthful Movement was negligible, but the damage done to the unions was very considerable since the adherents of National Socialism were their most inveterate critics and consequently exerted a disintegrating influence from within.

I entirely discountenanced all experiments which were destined from the very beginning to be unsuccessful. I would have considered it criminal to deprive a worker of some part of his scanty earnings on behalf of an organisation which, according to my inner conviction, could not promise any real advantage to its members.

If a new political party fades out of existence it is seldom a matter for regret, but nearly always for congratulation and nobody has a right to

complain, for what each individual contributes to a political movement is given with the idea that he may receive no return for it.

The man who pays his dues to a trade-union has the right to expect that the promises made to him will be kept in return; if this is not done, then the promoters of such a trade-union are swindlers, or at least irresponsible persons who ought to be brought to book.

The course of action we pursued in 1922 was adopted in accordance with these principles. Others thought they knew better and founded trade-unions.

They upbraided us for being short-sighted and failing to see into the future, but it did not take long for these organisations to disappear and the result was the same as in our own case, with this difference, that we had deceived neither ourselves nor other people.

