incidentally loses all claim to friendly benefits. The funds of a trade union applicable to trade and friendly purposes are never kept distinct (in the few cases in which some distinction is attempted, the society may “ borrow ” from the one fund in aid of the other in case of emergency); and a prolonged strike or depression of trade may so deplete the funds as to make it impossible for the society to meet its engagements as regards sickness or superannuation. Thus the friendly society operations of trade unions have strictly no actuarial basis, and in some cases the scale of contribution and benefit have been fixed with little regard to ultimate solvency.

On the other hand, the power of levying and varying the scale of contributions adds to some extent to the financial stability of the funds, and the provision of “ friendly ” as well as “ trade ” benefits by a trade union undoubtedly gives strength and continuity to the society, and increases its power of discipline over its members. Societies that only provide “ dispute ” pay are exposed to violent oscillations of membership, and also to a dangerous temptation to rush into an ill-considered strike owing to the mere accumulation of funds which can be used for no other purpose.

The statistics of trade union expenditure on benefits of various classes are given below.. Of the 100 principal unions, all provide dispute benefit; 79 in the year 1905 provided unemployed benefit (including in some cases travelling pay); 79, sick or accident benefit; 37, superannuation benefit; and 87, funeral benefit; 32 unions providing all four classes of benefit.

One of the most important functions of trade unions in many industries is the negotiation of agreements with employers and employers’ associations for the regulation of the conditions of employment in those industries. While undoubtedly the power of withdrawing its members from employment in the last resort adds to the power of a trade union in such negotiations, many of the most important agreements by which the conditions of labour of large bodies of workmen are governed are habitually con­cluded, and from time to time revised, by conferences of representatives of the trade union and employers without any strike taking place. To the functions of trade unions as fighting organizations and as friendly benefit societies should therefore be added that of providing the necessary machinery and basis for the conclusion of industrial agreements between bodies of workpeople and their employers (see Arbitration and Conciliation, and Strikes and Lock-outs).

While the broad objects of trade union policy are generally similar, their methods and features vary greatly in detail. Among the objects most frequently met with (besides those of raising wages and shortening hours, which may be said to be universal) are the enforcement of a “minimum” wage; the limitation of overtime; the restriction of numbers in the trade through the limitation of apprentices, or the regulation of the age of entrance; the restriction or regulation of piecework (in trades accustomed to “ time ’’ work) ; the preservation for members of the trade of the exclusive right to perform certain classes of work claimed by other trades (leading to so-called “ demarcation ” disputes) ; resistance to the encroachment of labourers on work considered to be “ skilled ” (leading to disputes as to the class of persons to be employed on machines, &c.); and the securing of a monopoly of employment for members of the union by a refusal to work with non-unionists.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Year. | Number of Unions. | Membership of Unions.@@1 |
| 1897 | 1292 | 1,622,713 |
| 1898 | 1261 | 1,659,480 |
| 1899 | 1255 | 1.820,755 |
| 1900 | 1244 | 1,928,035 |
| 1901 | 1238 | 1,939,585 |
| 1902 | 1203 | 1,925,800 |
| 1903 | 1187 | 1,903,596 |
| 1904 | 1153 | 1.864,374 |
| 1905 | 1136 | 1,887,823 |
| 1906 | 1161 | 2,106,283 |

The statistics of trade unions are very complete for recent years, but for earlier years the records are so fragmentary that it is im­possible to give exact figures showing the total growth of trade unions over a long period. The table at foot of preceding column, based on the statistics published by the board of trade, shows the number and membership of all trade unions in the United Kingdom making continuous returns for each of the ten years 1897 to 1906.

The fluctuations in membership correspond in the main to the oscillations of trade, membership declining in the years of depression and increasing with the revival of trade. The decline in the number of separate unions is chiefly due to the growing tendency to amalgamate into large societies.

The following table shows the distribution of trade unions among the various groups of trades in 1905:—

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Groups of Unions. | Number of  Unions. | Membership in 1905. | |
| Number. | Percentage of Total. |
| Mining and quarrying | 68 | 495,968 | 26 |
| Metal engineering and shipbuilding | 222 | 339.282 | 18 |
| Textile | 253 | 239.539 | 13 |
| Building | 101 | 205,383 | 11 |
| Railway, dock and other transport | 55 | 162,563 | 9 |
| Public employment | 48 | 72,182 | 4 |
| Printing, bookbinding and paper | 40 | 62,368 | 3 |
| Clothing | 35 | 60,407 | 3 |
| Wood-working and furnishing | 100 | 40,115 | 2 |
| General labour | 18 | 96,094 | 5 |
| All other unions | 196 | 113,922 | 6 |
| Total . | 1136 | 1,887,823 | 100 |

This table shows that the strength of trade unionism lies in the five first-named groups of trades—mining; metal engineering and shipbuilding; textile; building; and railway, dock and other transport—which among them account for over three-quarters of the total membership.

In agriculture, trade unionism is at present practically non- existent, but in 1875 there were important unions of agricultural labourers, though at no time did they include any considerable proportion of the total agricultural population.

Taking the men belonging to all trade unions together, we find that their number does not amount to more than about one in five of the adult men who belong to the classes from which trade unionists are drawn. . Only in a few groups do trade unionists form a high percentage of the total working population, *e.g.* coal-mining and cotton manufacture. The number of women belonging to trade unions at the end of 1906 was 162,453, distributed among 156 unions, of which, however, only 28 consisted exclusively of women. The great bulk of women trade unionists are found in the cotton trade, in which they actually outnumber the male members. Of all the women employed in factories and workshops, about one in twelve belongs to a trade union.

The available statistics with regard to the financial resources of trade unions, and their expenditure on various objects, are not so complete as those of membership, as the board of trade figures only relate to 100 of the principal unions. As, however, these unions include nearly two-thirds of the total membership, the figures showing their financial position may be accepted as being representative of the whole number of societies. In 1906 the income of these 100 societies was £2,344,157 or 36s. 9½d. per head; and their expenditure £1,958,676 or 3os. 9d. per head; and at the end of the year the funds in hand amounted to £5,198,536 or 81s. 7¼d. per head.

The actual rates of contribution per member vary greatly among the unions—from *Is.* up to £4 per annum. Generally speaking, the highest income per member is found among the unions in the metal, engineering and shipbuilding group, where in 1905 it averaged £3, 5s. 7¼d., while the average in the mining unions was only £1, 4s. 1½d., and among dock labourers still lower. The metal trades and the textile unions appear to hold the highest amount of funds compared with their membership, the amounts at the end of 1905 being £6, 3s. 8¼d. and £6, os. 3d. per head respectively in these groups, while in the building trade unions it was only 18s. 8½d. and in some societies of unskilled labourers far less than this.

The main items of expenditure of trade unions are “dispute” benefit, “ unemployed ” benefit, various friendly benefits (including sick and accident, superannuation and funeral), and working *ex­penses.* The proportions of expenditure on these various objects naturally vary greatly in different groups of unions, and also in different years, some of the items being affected largely by the general state of employment, and the occurrence or absence of im­portant disputes. On the basis, however, of an average of the ten years 1897-1906, the following analysis of the proportionate expendi- ture of the 100 principal unions on various classes of objects has been made: on disputes, 13-4%; on unemployed 22∙1 %; on friendly

@@@1 Includes a small number of members abroad.