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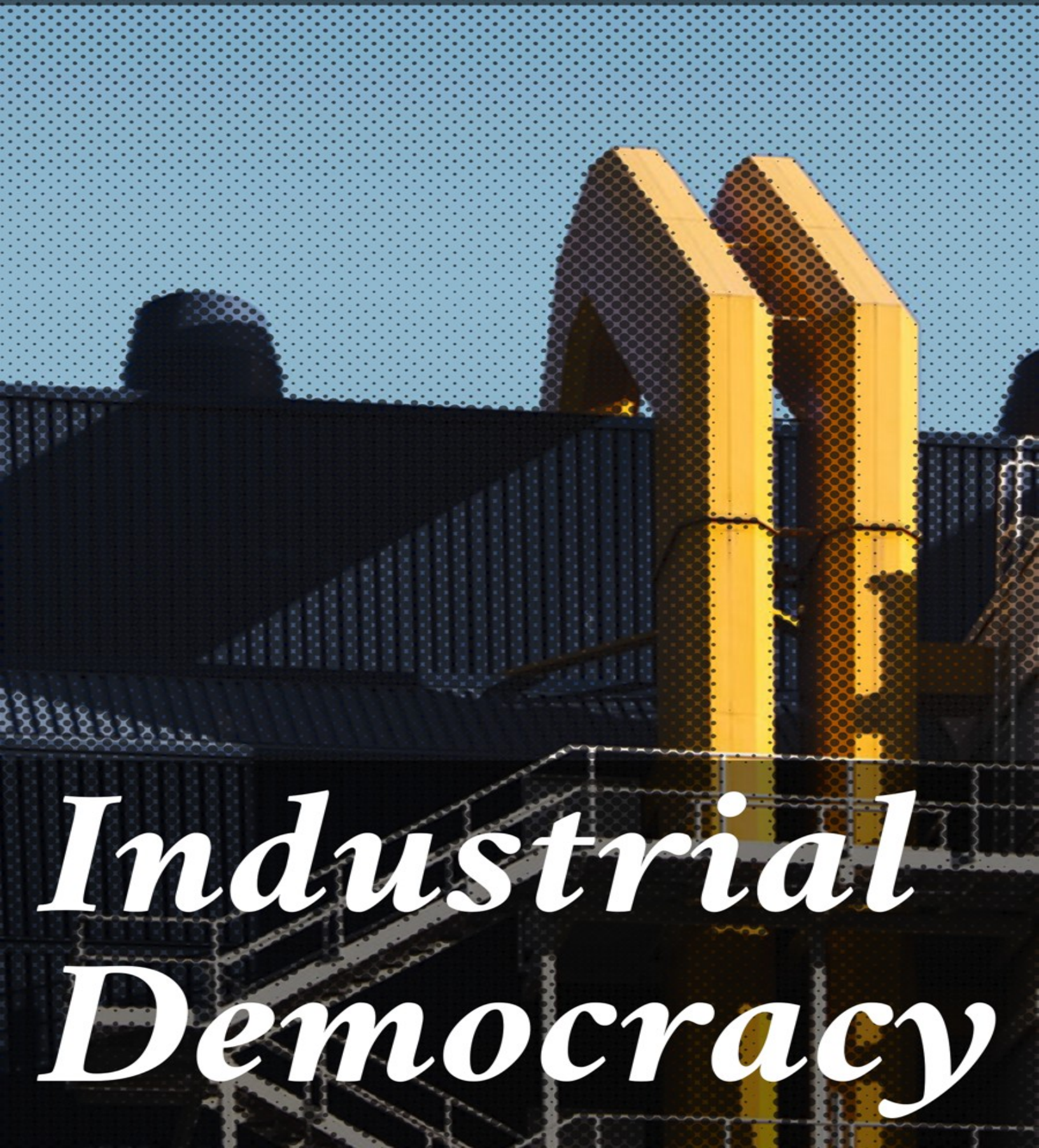

Industrial Democracy

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CHAPTER I PRIMITIVE DEMOCRACY

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In the local trade clubs of the eighteenth century,, democracy appeared in its simplest form. Like the citizens^ of Uri or Appenzell * the workmen were slow to recognise any other authority than " the voices " of all concerned! The members of each trade, in general meeting assembled] themselves made the regulations, applied them to particular cases, voted the expenditure of funds, and decided on such action by individual members as seemed necessary for the common weal. The early rules were accordingly occupied with securing the maintenance of order and decorum at these general meetings of " the trade " or "the body." With this view the president, often chosen only for the particular meeting, was treated with great respect and invested with special, though temporary,

- The eariy Trade Union general meetings have, indeed, many interesting

resemblances, both in spirit and in form, to the "Landesgemeinden," or general meetings of all citizens, of the old Swiss Cantons. The best description of these archaic Swiss democracies, as they exist to-day, is given by Eugene Rambert in his work Les Alpes Suisses: Etudes Jlistoriqties et Nationales (Lausanne, 1889). J. M. Vincent's State and Federal Government in Switzerland (Baltimore, 189 1) is

more precise and accurate than any other account in the English language. Freeman's picturesque reference to them in The Growth of the English Constitu- tion (London, 1872) is well known.

authority. Thus the constitution of the London Society of Woolstaplers, established 1785, declares "that at every meeting of this society a president shall be chosen to preserve the rules of decorum and good order; and if any member should not be silent on due notice given by the president, which shall be by giving three distinct knocks on the table, he shall fine threepence; and if any one shall in- terrupt another in any debate while addressing the president, he shall fine sixpence; and if the person so fined shall return any indecent language, he shall fine sixpence more; and should any president misconduct himself, so as to cause uproar and confusion in the society, or shall neglect to enforce a strict observance of this and the following article, he shall be superseded, and another president shall be chosen in his stead. -The president shall be accommodated with his own choice of liquors, wine only excepted." ^ And the Articles of the Society of Journeymen Brushmakers, to which no person was to be admitted as a member " who is not well-affected to his present Majesty and the Protestant succession, and in good health, and of a respectable char- acter," provide " that on each evening the society meets there shall be a president chosen from the members present to keep order; to be allowed a shilling for his trouble; any member refusing to serve the office to be

fined sixpence.' If any member dispute on politics, swear, lay wagers, promote gambling, or behave otherwise disorderly, and will not be silent when ordered by the chairman, he shall pay a fine of a shilling." ^

The rules of every old society consist mainly of safe^ guards of the efficiency of this general meeting. Wjiilst, political or religious wrangling, seditious sentiments or soiigs^ cursing, swearing, or obscene language, betting, wagering, gaming, or refusing to keep silence were penalised by fines, elaborate and detailed provision was made for the entertain-

1 The Artkles of the London Society of Woolstaplers (London, 1813). ' Articles of the Society of Journeymen Brushmakers, held at the sign of the Craven Head, Drury Latie (London, 1806).

nient of the members. Meeting, as all clubs did, at a public- house in a room lent free by the landlord, it was taken as a matter of course that each man should do his share of drinking. The rules often prescribe the sum to be spent at each meeting: in the case of the Friendly Society of Iron- founders, for instance, the meniber's monthly contribution in 1 809 was a shilling " to the box," and threepence for liquor, " to be spent whether present or not." The Brushmakqrs provided " that on every meeting night each member shall receive a pot ticket at eight o'clock, a pint at ten, and no more."^ And the Manchester Compositors resolved in 1826 " that tobacco be allowed to

such members of this society as require it during the hours of business at any meeting of the society." *

Afterthe president, the most important oflficers were, accordingly, the stewards or marshalmen, two or four members usually chosen^ by rotation. Their duty was, to use the words of the Cotton-spinners, " at every meeting to fetch all the liquor into the committee room, and serve it regularly round *; * and the members were, in some cases, " forbidden* to drink out of turn, except the officers at the table or a member on his first coming into the town." * Treasurer

1 The account book of the little Preston Society of Carpenters, whose mem- bership in 1807 averj^ed about forty-five, shows an expenditure at each meeting of 6s. to 7s. 6d. As late as 1837 the rules of the SteSin-Engine Makers' Society provided that one-third of the income — fourpence out of the monthly contribution of a shilling — " shall be spent in refreshments. ... To prevent disorder no person shall help himself to any drink in the club-room during club hours, but what is served him by the waiters or marshalmen who shall be ^(ipointed by the president every club night." Some particulars as to the dying away of this custom are given in our History if Trade Unionism, pp. 185, 186; see also the article by Pro£ W. J. Ashley on "Journeymen's clubs," in Political Science Quarterly, March 1897.

- MS. Minutes of the Manchester Typographical Society, 7th March 1826.

' Articles, Rules, Orders, and Regulations made and to be observed by and between the Friendly Associated Cotton-spinners within the township of Oldham (Oldham, 1797: reprinted 1829).

♦ Friendly Society of Ironfounders, Rules, 1809. The Rules of the Liverpool Shipwrights' Society of 1784 provided also "that each member that shall call for drink without leave of the stewards shall forfeit and pay for the drink they call for to the stewards for the use of the box. . . . That the marshalmen shall pay the over- plus of drink that comes in at every monthly meeting more than allowed by the

there was often none, the scanty funds, if not consumed as quickly as collected, being usually deposited with the publican who acted as host. Sometimes, however, we have the archaic box with three locks, so frequent among the gilds; and in such cases members served in rotation as " keymasters, *or, as we should now say,*

^Jiajstees, Thus the Edinburgh Shoemakers provided that " the keymasters shall be chosen by the roll, beginning at the top for the first keymaster, and at the middle of the roll for the youngest keymaster, and so on until the roll be finished. If any refuse the keymaster, he shall pay one shilling and sixpence sterling." ^ The ancient box of the Glasgow Ropemakers' Friendly Society (established 1824), elaborately decorated with the society's "coat of arms," was kept in the custody of the president, who was elected annually.* Down to within the last thirty years the custom was maintained on the " deacons' choosing," or annual

election day, of solemnly transporting this box through the streets of Glasgow to the house of the new president, with a procession of ropespinners headed by a piper, the ceremony terminating with a feast. The keeping of accounts and the writing of letters was a later develop- mentj and when a clerk or secretary was needed, he had perforce to be chosen from the small number qualified for

ithe work. But there is evidence that the early secre- taries served, like their colleagues, only for short periods,

society; and no member of this society is allowed to call for or smoak tobacco during club hours in the club room; for every such offence he is to forfeit and pay fourpence to the stewards for the use of the box." — Articles to he obseroed ty a Society of Shipwrights, or the True British Society, all Freemen (Liverpool, 1784), Articles 8 and 9.

1 Articles of the Journeymen Shoemakers of the City of Edinburgh (Edinburgh, 1778) — a society established in 1727.

^ Articles and Regulations of the Associated Jiopemaker^ Friendly Society (Glasgow, 1836), repeated in the General Laws and Regulations of the Glasgow Ropemakers' Trade Protective and Friendly Society (Glasgow, 1 884). The members-j of the Glasgow Typographical Society resolved, in 1823, "that a man be pro- vided on election nights to carry the box from the residence of the president to the place of meeting, and after the meeting to the new president's house." — MS. Minutes of general meeting, Glasgow Typographical Society, 4th October 1823.

and occupied, moreover, a position very subordinate to the! president.

Even when it was necessary to supplement the officers by some kind of committee, so far were these infant demo-j cracies from any superstitious worship of the ballot- box.j that, although we know of no case of actual choice by lot,*j- the committee-men were usually taken, as in the case, of the' Steam-Engine Makers' Society, " in rotation as their names appear on the books." * "A fine of one shilling," say the rules of the Southern Amicable Union Society of Wool-staplers, " shall be levied on any one who shall refuse to serve on the committee or neglect to attend its stated meetings, . . . and the next in rotation shall be called in his stead." ° The rules of the Liverpool Shipwrights declared " that the committee shall be chosen by rotation as they stand in the books; and any member refusing to serve the office shall forfeit ten shillings and sixpence."* As late as 1843 we find the very old Society of Curriers resolving that for this purpose " a list with three columns be drawn up of the whole of the members, dividing their ages as near as possible in the following manner: the elder, the middle-aged and the young; so that- the experience of the elder and the sound

1 The selection of officers by lot was, it need hardly be said, frequent in primitive times. It is interesting to find the practice in the Swiss " Landes- gemeinden." In 1640 the " Landesgemeinde " of Glarus began to choose eight candidates for each office, who then drew lots among themselves. Fifty years later Schwyz followed this example. By 1793 the " Landesgemeinde " of Glarus was casting lots

for all offices, including the cantonal secretaryship, the steward- ships of dependent territories, etc. The winner often sold his office to the highest bidder. The practice was not totally abolished until 1837, and old men still remember the passing round of the eight balls, each wrapped in black cloth, seven being silvern and the eighth gilt. — Les Alpes Suisses: j&tudes Historiques el Nationala, by Engine Rambert (Lausanne, 1889), pp. 226, 276.

- Jiules of the Steam-Engine Makers' Society, edition of 1837.

' Rules of the Southern Amicable Union of jVoelstaplers (London, 1837).

- Articles to be observed by the Association of the Friendly Union of Shipwrights,

instituted in Liverpool on Tuesday, nth November 1800 (Liverpool, 1800), Rule 19. The London Sailmakers resolved, in 1836, "that from this evening the calling for stewards shall begin from the last man on the committee, and that ftom and after the last steward the twelve men who stand in rotation on the book do form the committee." — MS. Minutes of general meeting, 26th September 1836.

judgment of the middle-aged will make up for any deficiency on the part of the young." ' In some cases, indeed, the members of the committee were actually chosen by the officers. Thus in the ancient society of Journeymen Paper- makers, where each " Grand Division "

had its committee of eight members, it was provided that " to prevent imposition part of the committee shall be changed every three months, by four old members going out and four new ones coming in; also a chairman shall be chosen to keep good order, which chairman, with the clerk, shall nominate the four new members which shall succeed the four old ones." ^ ' ^The early trade club was thus a democracy of the most rudimentary type, free alike from permanently differentiated officials, executive council, or representative assembly. The general meeting strove itself to transact all the business, and grudgingly delegated any of its functions either to officers or to committees. When this delegation ■ could no longer be avoided, the expedients of rotation and short periods of service were used " to prevent im- position " or any undue influence by particular members. In this earliest type of Trade Union democracy we find, in Ifaqt, the most childlike faith not only that "all men are l^qual," but also that " what concerns all should be decided by all."

It is obvious that this form of democracy was compatible only with the smallest possible amount of business. But it was, in our opinion, not so much the growth of the financial and secretarial transactions of the unions, as the exigencies of

• MS. Minutes of the London Society of Journeymen Curriers, January 1843.

' Rules and Articles to be observed by the Journeymen Papermakers throughout iB«^/a»</(i823), Appendix 18 to Report on Combination Laws, 1825, p. 56. The only Trade Union in which this example still prevails is that of the Flint

Glass Makers, where the rules until lately gave the secretary " the power to nominate a central committee (open to the objection of the trade), in whose hands the executive power of the society shall be vested from year to year." — Rules and Regulations of the National Flint Glass Makers' Sick and Friendly Society (Man- chester, 1890). This has lately been modified, in so far that seven members are now elected, the central secretary nominating four " from the district in which he resides, but open to the objection of the trade." — Rule 67 (Rules, reprinted with additions, Manchester, 1893).

their warfare with the employers, that first led to a departure from this simple ideal. Th e legal an d social persecutionr^fo^ which Trade Unionists were subject, at any rate up to 1824, made secrecy and promptitude absolutely necessary for sue- 1 cessful operations; and accordingly at all critical times we find the direction of affairs passing out of the hands of the general meeting into those of a responsible, if not a repre- sentative, committee. Thus the London Tailors, whose militant combinations between 1720 and 1834 repeatedly attracted the attention of Parliament,^ had practically two constitutions, one for peace and one for war. In quiet times, the society was made up of little autonomous general meet- ings of the kind described above at the thirty " houses of call " in London and Westminster. The organisation for war, as set forth in 1 8 1 8 by Francis Place, was very different: " Each house of call has a deputy, who on particular occasions is chosen by a kind of tacit consent, frequently without its being known

to a very large majority who is chosen. The deputies form a committee, and they again choose, in a somewhat similar way, a very small committee, in whom, on very particular occasions, all power resides, from whom all orders proceed, and whose commands are implicitly obeyed; and on no occasion has it ever been known that their commands have exceeded the necessity of the occasion, or that they have wandered in the least from the purpose for which it was understood they were appointed. So perfect indeed is the organisation, and so well has it been carried into effect, that no complaint has ever been heard; with so much simplicity and with so great certainty does the whole business appear to be conducted that the great body of journeymen rather acquiesce than assist in any way in it." ^ Again, the protracted legal proceedings of the Scottish Hand-

1 See the interesting Se/eci Documents illustrating the History of Trade Unionism: I. The Tailoring Trade, edited by F. W. Galton (London, 1896), being one of the " Studies " published by the London School of Economics and Political Science.

- The Gorgon, No. 20, 3rd October 1818, reprinted in The Tailoring Trade

by F. W. Galton, pp. 153, 154-

loom Weavers, ending in the great struggle when 30,000 looms from Carlisle to Aberdeen struck on a single day (lOth November 1 8 1 2), were conducted by an autocratic com-

mittee of five, sitting in Glasgow, and periodically summoning from all the districts delegates who carried back to their constituents orders which were implicitly obeyed.^ | Before the repeal of the Combination Laws in 1824, the enlfployers in all the organised trades complained bitterly of these " self- appointed" committees, and made repeated attempts to scatter them by prosecutions for combination or conspiracy! To this constant danger of prosecution may be ascribed some of the mysteiy which surrounds the actual constitution" of these tribunals gout .their appearance on the scene when- ever"an emergency calle^ ioi strong action was a necessary consequence of the failure of the clubs to provide any con- stitutional authority of a representative characteni

So far we have dealt principally with trade clubs confined to particular towns or districts. When, in any trade, these local clubs united to form a federal union, or when one of them enrolled members in other towns, government by a j general meeting of " the trade," or of all the members, became impracticable.^ Nowadays some kind of representa-

1 Evidence before the House of Commons Committee on Artisans and Machinery, 1824, especially that of Richmond.

- A branch of a national union is still governed by the members in general

meeting assembled; and for this and other reasons, it is customary for several separate branches to be established in large towns where the number of members becomes greater than can easily be accommodated in a single branch

meeting- place. Such branches usually send delegates to a district committee, which thus becomes the real governing authority of the town or district. But in certain unions the idea of direct government by an aggregate meeting of the trade still so far prevails that, even in so large a centre as London, resort is had to huge mass meetings. Thus the London Society of Compositors will occasionally summon its ten thousand members to meet in council to decide, in an excited mass meeting, the question of peace or war with their employers. And the National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives, which in its federal constitution adopts a large measure of representative institutions, still retains in its local organisation the aggregate meeting of the trade as the supreme governing body for the district. The Shoemakers of London or Leicester frequently hold meetings at which the attendance is numbered by thousands, with results that are occasionally calamitous to the union. Thus, when in 1891 the men of a certain London firm had impetuously left their work contrary to the agreement made by the union with

tive institutions would seem to have been inevitable at this stage. But it is significant to notice how slowly, reluctantly, and incompletely the Trade Unionists have incorporated ir their constitutions what is often regarded as the specifically Anglo-Saxon form of democracy — the elected representative! assembly, appointing and controlling a standing executive. Until the present generation, no Trade Union had ever formed its constitution

on this model. It is true that in the early days we hear of^ meetings of delegates from local ^

the employers, their branch called a mass meeting of the whole body of /the London members (seven thousand attending), which, after refusing even to hear the union officials, decided to support the recalcitrant strikers, with the result that the employers " locked out " the whole trade. (^Monthly Report of the National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives, November 1 891.) In 1893 the union executive found it necessary to summon at Leicester a special delegate meeting of the whole society to sit in judgment on the London members who had decided, at a mass meeting, to withdraw from- the national agreement to submit to arbitration. The circular calling the delegate meeting contains a vivid description of the scene at this mass meeting: " The hall was well filled, and Mr. Judge, president of the union, took the chair. From the outset it was soon found that the rowdy element intended to ^ain prevent a hearing, and thus make it impossible for our views to be laid before the bulk of the more intelligent and reasonable members. ... If democratic unions such as ours are to have the meetings stopped by such proceedings, ... if the members refuse to hear, and insult by cock-crowing and cat-calls their own accredited and elected executive, then it is time that other steps be taken." The delegate meeting, by 74 votes to 9, severely censured the London members, and reversed their decision (Circular of Executive Committee, 14th March 1893: Special Report of the Delegate Meeting at Leicester, 17th April 1893). In most unions, however, experience has shown that in truth "aggregate meetings"

are "aggravated meetings," and has led to their abandonment in favor of district committees or delegate meetings.

- In the History of Trade Unionism, p. 46, we described the Hatters as holding in 1772, 1775, and 1777, "congresses" of delegates from all parts of the

country. Further examination of the evidence (House of Commons Journals, vol. xxxvi.; Place MS. 27,799-68; Committee on Artisans and Machinery) inclines us to believe that these " congresses," like another in 1816, comprised only delegates from the various workshops in London. We can discover no instance during the eighteenth century of a Trade Union gathering made up of delegates from the local clubs throughout the country. But though the con- gresses of the Hatters probably represented only the London workmen, their " bye-laws " were apparently adopted by the clubs elsewhere, and came thus to be of national scope. Similar instances of national regulation by the principal centre of a trade may be seen in the "resolutions" addressed "to the Wool- staplers of England" by the London Society of Woolstaplers, and in the " articles to be observed by the Journeymen Papermakers throughout England," formulated at a meeting of the trade at large held at Maidstone. In the loose alliances of the local clubs in each trade, the chief trade centre often acted, in fiict, as the "governing branch."

clubs to adopt or amend the " articles " of their association. A "deputation" from nine local societies of

Carpenters met thus in London in 1827 to form the Friendly Society of Operative House Carpenters and Joiners, and similar meetings were annually held to revise the rules and adjust the finances of this federation. It would have been a natural development for such a representative congress to appoint a standing committee and executive ofificers to act on behalf of the whole trade. But when between 1824 and 1840 the great national societies of that generation settled down into their constitutions, the congress of elected representatives either found no place at all, or else was called together only at long intervals and for strictly limited purposes. In no case do we see it acting as a permanent supreme assembly. The Trade Union met the needs of expanding democracy by some remarkable experiments in constitution-making.

"C^^'The first step in the transition from the loose alliance of separate local clubs into a national organisation was the appointment of a seat of government or " governing branch.". The members residing in one town were charged with the responsibility of conducting the current business of the whole society, as well as that of their own branch. The branch ofificers and the branch committee of this town accord- ingly became the central authority.' Herft again the Ip aHing i dea was not so much to_ get a gover nment that wa iu-rpprp-

' In some of the more elaborate Trade Union constitutions formulated between 1820 and 1834 we find a hierarchy of authorities, none of them elected by the society as a whole, but each responsible for a definite part of the common admini- stration. Thus The Rules and Articles to be observed

by the Journeymen Paper- makers m 1823 provide "that there shall be five Grand Divisions throughout England where all money shall be lodged, that when wanted may be sent to any part where emergency may require." These " Grand Divisions " were the branches in the five principal centres of the trade, each being given jurisdiction over all the mills in the counties round about it. Above them all stood " No. i Grand Division " (Maidstone), which was empowered to determine business ot too serious a nature to be left to any other Grand Division. This geographical hierarchy is interesting as having apparently furnished the model for most of the constitutions of the period, notably of the Owenite societies of 1833-1834, including the Builders' Union and the Grand National Consolidated Trades Union ifself.

sentative of the socie ty as to make e ach sectio n take its turn at the privileges ami bu rdens~of~admin istratioa The seat of government was accordingly always changed at short) intervals, often by rotation. Thus the Steam-Engine Makers' rules of 1826 provide that " the central branch of the society shall be held alternately at the different branches of this society, according as they stand on the books, commencing with Branch No. i, and tihe secretary of the central branch shall, after the accounts of the former year have been balanced, send the books to the next central branch of the society." ^ In other cases the seat of government was periodically deter- mined by vote of the whole body of members, who appear usually to have been

strongly biassed in favor of shifting it from town to town. The reason appears in this statement by one of the lodges of the Ironfounders: " What, we ask, has been the history of nearly every trade society in this respect? Why, that when any branch or section of it has possessed the governing power too long, it has become care- less of the society's interests, tried to assume irresponsible powers, and invariably by its remissness opened wide the doors of peculation, jobbery, and fraud." *

The institution of a " governing branch " had the advantagQ of being the cheapest machinery of central administration^ that could be devised. By it the national union secured, its executive committee, at no greater expense than a small local society.^ And so long as the function of the national

The same geographical hierarchy was a feature of the constitution of the Southern Amicable Society of Woolstaplers until the last revision of rules in 1892. In only one case has a similar hierarchy survived. The United Society of Brushmakers, established in the eighteenth century, is still divided into geographical divisions governed by the six head towns, with London as the centre of communication. The branches in the West Riding, for instance, are governed by the Leeds com- mittee, and when in 1892 the Sheffield branch had a strike, this was managed by the secretary of the Leeds branch.

I Rule 19; rules of 1826 as reprinted in the Annual Report for 1837.

' Address of the Bristol branch of the Friendly Society of Ironfounders to the members at large (in Annual Report for

1849).

' Both the idea of rotation of office, and that of a local governing branch, can be traced to the network of village sick-clubs which existed all over England in the eighteenth century. In 1824 these clubs were described by a hostile critic as " under the management of the ordinary members who succeed to the several offices

executive was confined to that of a centre of communication between practically autonomous local branches, no alteration in the machinery was necessary. The duties of the secretary, like those of his committee, were not beyond the competence of ordinary artisans working at their trade and devoting only their evenings to their official business. But with the multir plication of branches and the formation of a central fund, the secretarial work of a national union presently absorbed the whole time of a single officer, to whom, therefore, a salary jjad to be assigned. As the salary came from the common fund, the right of appointment passed, without question, from the branch , rneeting to " the voices " of the whole body of members. (Thus the general secretary was singled out for a unique positiofi: alone among the officers of the union he was elected by the whole body of members. \ Meanwhile the supreme authority continued to be " the TOfees." Every pro-, position not covered by the original " articles," together with all questions of 'peace and war, was submitted to the votes of the members.^ But this was not all. Each branch, in

in rotation; frequently without being qualified either by ability, independence, or impartiality for the due discharge of their respective offices; or under the control of a standing committee, composed of the most active and often the least eligible members residing near i he place of meeting." — The Constitution cf Friendly Societies upon Legal and Scientific Principles, by Rev. John Thomas Becher (2nd edition, London, 1824), p. 50,

Comparing small things with great, we may say that the British Empire is administered by a " governing branch," The business common to the Empire as a whole is transacted, not by imperial or federal officers, but by those of one part of the Empire, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland; and they are supervised, not by an Imperial Diet or Federal Assembly, but by the domestic legislature at Westminster.

' The very ancient United Society of Brushmakers, which dates from the early part of the eighteenth century, retains to this day its archaic method of collecting " the voices." In London, said to be the most conservative of all the districts, no alteration of rule is made without " sending round the box " as of yore. In the society's ancient iron box are put all the papers relating to the subject under dis- cussion, and a member out of employment is deputed to carry the box from shop to shop until it has travelled " all round the trade." When it arrives at a shop, all the men cease work and gather round; the box is opened, its contents are read and discussed, and the shop delegates are then and there instructed how to vote at the next delegate meeting. The box is then refilled and sent on to the next shop. Old

minutes of 1829 show that this custom has remained unchanged, down to the smallest detail, for, .at any rate, a couple of generations. It is probably nearly two centuries old.

general meeting assembled, claimed the right to have any proposition whatsoever submitted to the vote of the society as a whole. And thus we find, in almost every Trade Union which has a history at all, a most instructive series of experi- ments in the use, misuse, and limitations of the Referendum^

Such was the typical Trade Union constitution of the last generation. In a few cases it has survived, almost unchanged, down to the present day, just as its pre-decessor, the archaic local club governed by the general meeting, still finds representatives in the Trade Union world. But wherever an old Trade Union has maintained its vitality, its constitution has been progressively modified, whilst the most powerful of the modern unions have been formed on a different pattern. An examination of this evolutionary process will bring home to us the transitional character of the existing constitutional forms, and give us valuable hints towards the solution, in a larger field, of the problem of uniting efficient administration with popular control.

We have already noted that, in passing from a local tSN a national organisation, the Trade Union unwittingly left behind the ideal of primitive democracy. The setting apart j of one man to do the clerical work destroyed the possibility of equal and identical service by all the members, and laid

the foundation of a separate governing class. The practice of requiring members to act in rotation was silently abandoned^ Once chosen for his post, the general secretary could rely with confidence, unless he proved himself obviously unfit or grossly incompetent, on being annually re-elected. Spending all day at office work, he soon acquired a professional expert- ness quite out of the reach of his fellow- members at the bench or the forge. And even if some other member possessed natural gifts equal or superior to the acquired skill of the existing officer, there was, in a national organisa- tion, no opportunity of making these qualities known. The general secretary, on the other hand, was always adver- tising his name and his personality to the thousands of

members by the printed circulars and financial reports, which became the only link between the scattered branches, and afforded positive evidence of his competency to perform the regular work of the office. With every increase in the society's membership, with every extension or elaborationy of its financial system or trade policy, the position of the salaried official became, accordingly, more and more sequrej^ "The general secretaries themselves changed with the develop ment of their office. The work could no longer be efficiently performed by an ordinary artisan, and some preliminary office training became almost indispensable^ The Coalminers, for instance, as we have shown in t5uf- description of* the Trade Union world, have picked their secretaries to a large extent from a specially

trained section, the checkweigh-men.^ The Cotton Operatives have even adopted a system of competitive examination among the candidates for their staff appointments." In other unions any candidate who has not proved his capacity for office work and trade negotiations would stand at a serious disadvantage in the election, where the choice is coming evpry /day to be confined more clearly to the small class of minor officials. The paramount necessity of efficient administration has co-operated with this permanence in producing a progressive differentiation of an official governing class, more and more marked off by character, training, and duties from the bullT ^ the members. The annual election of the general secretary by a popular vote, far from leading to frequent rotation of office and equal service by all the members, has, in fact, invariably resulted in permanence of tenure exceeding even that of the English civil servant. It is^ accordingly interesting to notice that, in the later rules of some of the most influential of existing unions, the ipractical permanence of the official staff is tacitly recognised (by the omission of all provision for re-election. Indeed, the

1 History of Trade Unionism, p. 291.

2 Ibid. p. 294; see also the subsequent chapter on ' ' The Method of Collective Bargaining," where a specimen examination paper is reprinted.

Amalgamated Association of Operative Cotton-spinners goes so far as expressly to provide in its rules that the

general secretary " shall continue in office so long as he gives satis- faction." ^

While everything was thus tending to exalt the position^ of the salaried official, the executive committee, under whose direction he was placed, being composed of men working at their trade, retained its essential weakness. Though modi- fied in unimportant particulars, it continued in nearly all the old societies to be chosen only by one geographical sectionj of the members. At first each branch served in rotation as the seat of government. This quickly gave way to a system of selecting the governing branch from among the more important centres of the trade. Moreover, though the desire 1 periodically to shift the seat of this authority long manifested itself and still lingers in some trades,* the growth of anj official staff, and the necessity of securing accommodation on some durable tenancy, has practically made the head-f quartgrs— stationary, even if the change has not been ex-j pressly recorded in the rules. Thus the Friendly Society of Ironfounders has retained its head office in London since 1 846, and the Friendly Society of Operative Stonemasons since 1883. The United Society of Boilermakers, which long wandered from port to port, has remained in Newcastle since 1880; and finally" settled the question in 1888 by building itself palatial offices on a freehold site.' Here again

^ Rule 12 in the editions of Rules of 1891 and 1894.

' Notably the Plumbers and Irondressers. In 1877 a proposal at the general council of the Operative Bricklayers' Society to convert the executive into a shifting one, changing the headquarters every third year, was only

defeated by a casting vote. — Operative Bricklaytrf Society Trade Circular, September 1877.

^ Along with this change has gone the differentiation of national business from that of the branch. The committee work of the larger societies became more than could be undertaken, in addition to the branch management, by men giving only their evenings. We find, therefore, the central executive committee becoming a body distinct from the branch committee, sometimes (as in the United Society of Operative Plumbers) elected by the same constituents, but more usually by the members of all the branches within a convenient radius of the central office. Thus the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters gives the election to the members within twelve miles of the head office— that is, to the thirty-five branches in and near Manchester— and the Friendly Society of Ironfounders to the six branches of the

^the deeply -rooted desire on the part of Trade Union demo- icrats to secure to each section an equal and identical share «n the government of the society has had to give way before >the necessity of obtaining e fficient ad ministration. In ceasing to be movable the executive committee lost even such , moral influence over the general secretary as was conveyedj^ by an express and recent delegation by the remainder of the society. The salaried official, elected by the votes of all the members, could in fact claim to possess more representative authority than a committee whose functions as an executive depended

merely on the accident of the society's offices being built in the town in which the members of the committee happened to be working. In some societies, moreover, the idea of Rotation of Office so far survived that the committee men were elected for a short term and disqualified for re-election. Such inexperienced and casually selected I^^QSEmittees of tired manual workers, meeting only in the evening, usually found themselves incompetent to resist, or even to criticise, any practical proposal that might be brought forward by the permanent trained professional whom they were supposed to direct and control.^

In face of so weak an executive committee the most obvious check upon the predominant power of the salaried officials was the elementary device of a written constitution. The ordinary workman, without either experience or imagina- tion, fondly thought that the executive government of a great national organisation could be reduced to a mechanical obedience to printed rules. Hence the constant elaboration of the rules of the several societies, in the vain endeavor to leave nothing to the discretion of officers or corhmittees. It was an essential part of the faith of these primitive democrats that the difficult and detailed work of drafting and amendindf

London district. In the United Society of Boilennakeis, down to 1897, the twenty lodges in the Tyne district, each in rotation, nominated one of the seven members of which the executive committee is composed.

• The only organisation, outside the Trade Union world, in which the execu- tive committee and the seat of government are changed annually, is, we believe,' the