

Trade Union Organisation in Ireland

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In this paper I propose to review briefly various aspects of the Irish trade union movement; its development and membership, the Congresses and the new Irish Congress of Trade Unions, theories of trade union structure, and some probable future lines of development. As employers' organisations are also described as trade unions, it is perhaps necessary to say that my observations will be confined to workers' trade unions.

Growth and Membership

Due to the illegality of trade union combination in the earlier part of the nineteenth century, there is necessarily some confusion between organisations which were then simply benevolent societies, and organisations which were in fact performing trade union functions. One Society, the Dublin Typographical Provident Society, this year celebrates its 150th anniversary. Generally, societies claiming a long history are, like the D.T.P.S., craft unions and, again, like the D.T.P.S., local unions, or alternatively branches of unions which began as autonomous local organisations and later joined in national amalgamations. The process of national amalgamation of craft unions gathered impetus from the time of the foundation of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers in Britain in 1851 and the Carpenters in 1860. The craft unions carry with them a tradition of local autonomy and, in a few cases are, in fact, close federations with local branches preserving their identity as separate unions.

An attempt to co-ordinate trade unions in Britain on a National basis was made by Robert Owen in 1834. This attempt failed, and the union collapsed within a year, but the idea of one co-ordinated organisation of trade unions has been carried forward and from time to time has been advocated in various forms.

Another union which celebrated an anniversary this year was the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union, founded fifty years ago. Up to the 1880s attempts to organise workers other than skilled workers had not been successful. In 1889 successful action by gas workers and dockers in London led to the widespread and successful organisation of these workers in other areas, and thence

to the development of the big general unions. The general unions however are not confined to unskilled workers. In a number of cases highly skilled craftworkers preferred to associate with the big general unions than to form relatively weak national organisations of craftworkers. Prior to the formation of the general unions, another kind of union originated with the establishment of the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants in 1871. This was the industrial union, which was designed to organise every worker within a particular industry. At one time the industrial union was regarded as the more logical form of organisation which, in the opinion of its supporters would, in due course, supersede the older craft-type organisations. In fact this has not happened.

Before the Irish Free State was established it was natural for Irish local unions to join with unions organising similar workers in Britain. Therefore a number of Irish branches of British craft unions were originally Irish local unions. In some cases the Irish unions now existing were formed by an Irish amalgamation of local unions, such as the Irish Bakers' Union, founded as an amalgamation in 1913. In other cases Irish unions were formed by branches breaking away or arranging to secede from British unions. Again other Irish unions were founded to organise workers previously unorganised, and grew on that basis. The growth of Irish union membership, as might be expected, has been greatest in the Republic and relatively slow in Northern Ireland.

We have therefore at present in Ireland a few local unions, mainly skilled unions, a few Irish national craft, occupational and industrial unions, a large number of Irish branches of British craft unions, a few of them large, many of them very small, and a small number of large general unions, both Irish and British, which between them organise more workers than all the other unions put together.

Through the early years of the twentieth century the Irish Trade Union movement continued to grow in strength. In the strikes of 1907 in Belfast and 1913 in Dublin it asserted its militancy and power. James Connolly advocated the better organisation of the movement to achieve revolutionary objectives, and despite the event of 1916 and the world war the movement continued to expand up to 1921.

Thereafter the movement receded. The Irish Trade Union Congress and Labour Party, as it then was, was not only an industrial but also a political organisation and it formed the main opposition party in the Dáil. But union membership was falling. The membership of the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union fell from 100,000 in 1922 to 20,000 in 1929. The fall in membership in the traditional craft unions was substantially lower. The following table sets out the affiliated membership of the Irish T.U.C. 1922 to 1958, and the C.I.U. from 1945 to date.

| Year | I.T.U.C. | Year | I.T.U.C. | Year | I.T.U.C. | C.I.U. |
|------|----------|------|----------|------|-------------|-------------|
| 1922 | 189,000 | 1934 | 115,000 | 1945 | 146,000 | 77,500 |
| 1923 | 183,000 | 1935 | 125,000 | 1946 | 147,000 | 80,000 |
| 1924 | 175,000 | 1936 | 134,000 | 1947 | 163,000 | 104,315 |
| 1925 | 149,000 | 1937 | 146,000 | 1948 | 187,000 | 132,097 |
| 1926 | 123,000 | 1938 | 161,000 | 1949 | 196,000 | 159,609 |
| 1927 | 113,000 | 1939 | 162,000 | 1950 | 197,000 | 170,292 |
| 1928 | 103,000 | 1940 | 163,000 | 1951 | 211,000 | 170,601 |
| 1929 | 92,000 | 1941 | 173,000 | 1952 | 214,396 | 180,893 |
| 1930 | 102,000 | 1942 | 164,000 | 1953 | 208,825 | 188,929 |
| 1931 | 102,000 | 1943 | 183,000 | 1954 | 211,141 | 194,138 |
| 1932 | 95,000 | 1944 | 187,000 | 1955 | 218,000 | 194,138 |
| 1933 | 95,000 | | | 1956 | 221,000 | 192,905 |
| | | | | 1957 | 222,000 | 192,991 |
| | | | | 1958 | 226,333 | 187,969 |
| | | | | | (66 unions) | (21 unions) |

It will be noted that the lowest total membership recorded was reached in 1929, before the effects of the slump were felt in this country. From 1933 onwards, with the increasing employment in industry, union membership steadily increased. It continued to increase throughout the war years notwithstanding the fall in industrial employment during that period. That this was so may be ascribed in a large part to the effect of the wages bonus system. Workers found that the increases in wages permitted under the Emergency Powers Orders could be obtained almost automatically through a trade union, and there is no doubt that at this time many groups of workers joined unions with this purpose in mind. After the war, employment in industry expanded rapidly while, at the same time, the establishment of the Labour Court and the pattern of post war wage negotiations were conducive to union membership. While the very steep rise in affiliated membership between 1944 and 1946 is partly accounted for by some unions which had not previously been affiliated joining one or other of the Congresses, and by the fact that some of the larger unions had understated their increase in membership prior to 1944, the total affiliated membership has steadily continued to increase up to the present time.

The substantial increase in union membership in post-war years indicated by Congress affiliations, is confirmed by the Registrar's figures. The figures published by the Registrar of trade unions relate only to Irish unions and, of course, to the Republic. Excluding employers' organisations the membership of Irish registered unions in 1944 was stated as 130,000 and in 1956 was stated as 257,000.

Trade union membership figures are also compiled by the Department of Industry and Commerce from returns submitted in accordance with the requirements of the Trade Union Acts, 1941-2. Some unions are exempt, and the returns are made by each union only once in each period of three years, but these returns include both British and Irish unions and are probably the most

complete available statement of trade union membership. They are accordingly used in the following estimate of total trade union membership, with supplementary information from the other sources indicated.

NUMBER AND MEMBERSHIP OF UNIONS.

| Description | No. | Membership | Source |
|---|------|------------|---|
| <i>Unions affiliated to Congress</i> | | | |
| Licensed Irish Trade Unions | (39) | 250,499 | Dept. of Industry and Commerce (1956-59 returns). |
| Licensed British Trade Unions | (23) | 41,147 | do. do. |
| Unlicensed Irish Trade Unions | (4) | 12,200 | Congress affiliation. |
| <i>Unaffiliated Unions</i> | | | |
| Licensed Irish Trade Unions | (5) | 16,072 | Dept. of Industry and Commerce. |
| Licensed British Trade Unions | (5) | 1,267 | do. do. |
| Unlicensed Irish Trade Unions | (29) | 6,000 | (Rough estimate—various sources). |
| <i>Total Membership in Republic</i> | | 327,185 | |
| <i>Total Membership in N. I.</i> | | 198,000 | Registrar (N.I.). |
| | | 525,185 | |

Of the 44 licensed Irish unions only 8 have a membership exceeding 5,000. Only 1 unlicensed Irish union has a membership exceeding 5,000. Of the 28 licensed British unions only 2 have a membership in the Republic exceeding 5,000. These 11 unions represent 242,420 members, or two-thirds of the total membership of unions in the Republic.

The unlicensed and unaffiliated unions are mainly service organisations, some with a very small membership and none exceeding 1,000. The remaining 76 unions include 39 with less than 1,000 members.

In the 32 counties, on the basis of Congress affiliation figures, there are 13 unions with over 5,000 members, which, between them, account for an affiliated membership of 316,600 out of a total affiliated membership of 414,000. These 13 unions include 3 general unions with a membership of 215,000 and 3 craft or occupational unions with a membership of 48,500.

It is notable also that "white collar" workers are fairly well organised. Licensed unions of bank and local government officials, journalists, musicians, actors, insurance workers, commercial

travellers and distributive workers and clerks, have a total membership of 33,811 (*Industry and Commerce returns*). Unlicensed unions of teachers (excluding secondary teachers), civil servants, post office clerks and telephonists, and the clerical sections of general unions have a total membership of approximately 32,500 (*Registrar, Congress affiliation, Returns to Clerical and Administrative Workers Committee of I.C.T.U.*). There are therefore approximately 66,300, or roughly 20 per cent. of the 327,000 organised workers in the Republic, employed in "white-collar" occupations.

The Congresses

There are now three trade union congresses, the Irish Trade Union Congress which was established in 1894, which includes both Irish unions and Irish branches of British unions, the Congress of Irish Unions which was established in 1945, which includes only Irish unions, and the new Irish Congress of Trade Unions established on 11th February, 1959, which will include (a) Irish unions and (b) British unions which concede specified autonomous powers to their Irish membership.

The Irish Trade Union Congress and the Congress of Irish Unions propose to dissolve their organisations at meetings to be held in July 1959. During the period between now and July the Irish Congress of Trade Unions will act on behalf of the I.T.U.C. and the C.I.U. in the same way as the Provisional United Organisation did for the past three years. Unlike the Provisional Organisation which was a temporary body, representative of the two Congresses, the I.C.T.U. will proceed to accept the direct affiliation of trade unions and trades councils. It is hoped that, by July, most or all of the unions affiliated to both Congresses will be affiliated to the new I.C.T.U. After July the I.C.T.U. will be the only centre in existence and it will represent the unions which have become affiliated to it in the interim period.

The provisions relating to the eligibility of unions for affiliation are set out in clause 2 of the Constitution of the I.C.T.U. which is as follows :

2. Trade Unions shall be eligible for affiliation to Congress if they conform to either of the following conditions :

- (a) Trade Unions shall have their headquarters in Ireland and their executive control in respect of industrial, financial and political matters, vested in and exercised by appropriate executive bodies within Ireland.

or

- (b) Where a Trade Union's organisation and membership extends outside Ireland and its executive authority is exercised from headquarters outside Ireland, it shall be eligible to affiliate to Congress only if it complies to the satisfaction of the Executive Council with following requirements :

- (i) The Trade Union shall provide that only members of the Trade Union resident in Ireland may be appointed as delegates to an Annual or Special Delegate Conference, or nominated for election to any office in Congress.

(This is at present generally observed. The majority of unions send only Irish delegates to the Irish T.U.C.)

- (ii) The Trade Union shall provide that decisions on matters of an industrial or political nature which arise out of and are in connection with the internal economic and political conditions of Ireland and are of direct concern to Irish members only shall be considered and decided upon by Irish members provided that the decisions shall have due regard to and shall not prejudice the position of members outside Ireland. A delegate Conference of Irish members or an Irish Committee elected by the Irish membership shall make such decisions.

(Most of the larger organisations have some form of Irish Committee, either a special Irish Committee, or simply an Irish division or Irish area council. A problem arises, however, with some unions which have two divisions in Ireland, or which include Ireland and a part of England or Scotland in the same division. Even in these cases there is usually some way of getting the views of the Irish membership on such matters as the agenda of the Irish T.U.C., and for the purpose of this clause any *ad hoc* body, which does in fact represent the Irish branches, or the Irish divisions, and no one else, is accepted by the I.C.T.U., even if the Irish Committee is not specifically sanctioned by any union rule.)

- (iii) The Trade Union shall make reasonable provision whereby the Irish Committee or Conference may exercise financial control and direction over funds collected from Irish members at least to the extent of payment of local administrative expenses and/or benefits or certain benefits.

(As most union branches do in fact pay benefits according to rule, this clause is unlikely to give much trouble. The P.U.O. Committee recognised that a union cannot give complete financial autonomy to any of its parts. Nevertheless the clause remains as an indication of the P.U.O.'s view that in financial, as in other matters, Irish members of British unions should, as far as possible, be given such degree of autonomy as might be compatible with the structure of the union.)

The Irish T.U.C. accepted into affiliation not only trade unions, but also trades councils. Trades councils are local organisations of union branches. Some trades councils have a longer history than the Congress itself, and the organisations which took the leading part in establishing the Irish T.U.C. were the Belfast and Dublin Trades Councils. In the early days of the Irish T.U.C., when it was more an annual meeting than an organisation with continuous existence, the councils provided union branches with the necessary machinery for co-ordinating policy. If disputes involving two or more unions in Dublin or Cork or Belfast arose they could be discussed by the council and other unions kept informed through the council. There were councils in all the principal towns, and

there were councils, with a less continuous existence, in some of the smaller towns. In recent years however the functions of the councils have to a large extent been taken over by the Congresses. The C.I.U. in particular has established machinery for inter-union discussions on disputes likely to involve more than one union, and both Congresses operate Disputes Committees to resolve disputes between unions. Such matters as wage movements have been dealt with at national level, leaving little for the councils to do. Nevertheless, while they have lost some of their old major functions, the councils still have a useful place in the trade union movement. They are, in particular, a direct line of contact between the Congresses and union branches, and a good council can act as a useful source of information both to the Congresses and to its branches. Some councils, particularly in the smaller towns, have interested themselves in the establishment of Development Committees, and have been active in efforts to have suitable industries established in their locality. They have in a few cases assisted in the organisation of trade union educational courses or lectures. It is not necessary for a council to be affiliated, and a large number of councils, other than those at present affiliated to the Congresses, are known to be in existence. Some of these are united councils which, during the period of the split, could not be affiliated to either Congress as they included branches of unions affiliated to both Congresses. The new I.C.T.U. recognises the valuable contribution which local councils can make to the movement, particularly as lines of communication, and it will undoubtedly endeavour to secure the organisation of councils in every town. They will not however encourage these councils to affiliate. Few local councils can in fact afford the expense of sending a delegate to Congress, but if some fifty or sixty councils were formed, and sent up to seventy delegates to Congress, there would be some danger of creating a situation in which council delegates, without the same responsibility as union delegates, could dominate or unduly influence Congress policy. In Britain this problem has been resolved by simply refusing the right of affiliation to trades councils. The I.C.T.U., perhaps conscious of the movement's debt to the old-established councils, has not refused the right of affiliation but it has made it quite expensive. It has limited councils to a maximum delegation of two, and it has, at the same time, offered as an alternative a form of registration which gives councils, for a small fee, all the benefits they would derive from affiliation except the right to send delegates to Congress.

The I.C.T.U., in setting out its objects, puts first the maintenance of the democratic character and structure of the trade union movement and, in this connection, refers to Freedom of Association and the Right to Organise. This is not an empty formula. When, some years ago, the Irish T.U.C. presented to the first Labour Minister for Industry and Commerce a statement of trade union demands for legislative or administrative action, they placed first on the list the ratification of the International Labour Organisation Conventions 87 and 98 on Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise. They did so because they considered that various proposals for the new trade union legislation which had

been made in previous years contravened the fundamental requirements of effective trade union action which are guaranteed by that Convention. In Northern Ireland, up to the present year, when the Trade Disputes and Trade Unions Act of 1927 was repealed, Convention 87 could not be applied, and trade union agitation for the repeal of that Act was fortified by the existence of that Convention. Apart from Protection of Freedom of Association against undesirable legislation, however, the statement contained in the first object of the I.C.T.U. has relevance to the action which it may take to secure the better internal organisation of the trade union movement. I shall refer to this again later with reference to the organisational problem and the various concepts of trade union structure which have to be related to each other if a more rational and more effective movement is to be evolved.

The first object also refers specifically to the right to strike.

The second, third and fourth objects are social and economic and refer to democratic government, promotion of co-operation, development of national resources, worker participation in control.

Finally, the objects include co-operation with workers' organisations in other countries, and with other democratic organisations.

In setting out its functions, or the methods of achieving its objectives, the I.C.T.U. again puts first the immediate question of safeguarding wages, hours, working conditions. It recognises the new custom of national negotiation by including it as its second function. Third comes better organisation within the movement, including the encouragement of amalgamation and reduction of the number of unions. This, as well as freedom of association, will be referred to again at a later stage. The functions also recognise the need for improved services and specify in particular research, information, educational facilities and legal advice. The Constitution returns to this subject again in paragraph 42, which is as follows:

"The services which it shall be the purpose of Congress to provide for affiliated organisations, within the financial resources available, shall include the following:

- (a) The provision of the services of trained full-time officials to act as secretaries, information officers and advisors to Industrial Committees established with the approval of the Executive Council by affiliated Trade Unions.
- (b) The establishment of a Legal Department and an International Department.
- (c) The provision of adequate research and information services; health safety and welfare advisory services and such other specialised services as may prove desirable.
- (d) The provision of adequate publicity services, periodicals or newspapers, pamphlets and books.
- (e) The provision of trade union educational and training services."

It is self-evident that the smaller the units comprising a trade union movement, the greater the need for central services. Certain central services, for example, are identical, irrespective of the size of the movement. The examination of new legislation, such as the Factories Act of 1955, the proposed amendment of the law relating

to Workmen's Compensation, the abolition of compulsory arbitration in Northern Ireland and other such Acts require the same detailed examination by the Irish Congress as is given to similar acts by the British T.U.C. In the cases I have mentioned however and many others, the position of the Irish trade union movement is eased by the fact that legislation in both Northern Ireland and the Republic tends to follow British precedents, and the observations of the British T.U.C. are in these cases available to assist the Irish Congress in its work. This is not always the case however and in the Trade Union Acts of 1941-2, the Industrial Relations Act of 1946, the Offices Act of 1958 and the Apprenticeship Bill which is now under consideration, new ground has been broken, and it has been necessary for the Irish Congress in these cases to examine and submit observations on the Government's proposals without the assistance of any outside precedent. Again, if a trade union centre prepares observations on proposals for an I.L.O. Convention, the preparation of these observations requires no more and no less time and labour whether the subject of the Convention affects millions of workers, as in Britain, or hundreds of thousands, as in Ireland. The adjudication of an inter-union dispute requires the same amount of investigation irrespective of whether the number of workers involved is 500 or 50. Relatively, therefore, a small trade union centre requires to undertake more work for its members than a large trade union centre.

Apart, however, from the relatively greater requirements arising from the performance of similar services, there are additional services which the individual small unions cannot provide for themselves. In Britain, where the membership of the A.T.G.W.U. numbers over 1,000,000 and in general the size of individual unions is so much greater than in Ireland, it is customary for such unions to provide, within their own organisation, such specialised services as they may need. The A.T.G.W.U. and other, much smaller, British unions have their own research departments, their own educational departments, and can afford to appoint officers to specialise in particular fields. In Ireland on the other hand, only the largest unions can afford to appoint specialised officers, and even the largest unions have not many such officials. In these circumstances the reasonable thing to do is to pool the resources of Irish unions and provide the necessary services on a co-operative basis. This is the intention set out in paragraph 42. This intention will not be realised overnight and, indeed, the financial provisions in the Constitution of the new Congress would not pay for the services listed. A beginning will be made, however, and it is hoped that that beginning will be sufficiently effective to justify further expansion.

Finally, the new services to be provided include publicity. The Irish trade union movement is not alone in finding it difficult to maintain communication with its own membership. The modern pattern of suburban living, now being further consolidated by T.V., makes the old system of communication through branch meetings very difficult. It is necessary that there should be means of communication, however, and in these days that means expensive publicity. Public opinion, too, must be made aware of the trade

union viewpoint, and public relations is now a specialised job. The need for trade union publicity and the objective of providing it is recognised in clause (d) of paragraph 42 of the Constitution, already quoted.

The Constitution of the I.C.T.U. in paragraph 39 sets out the functions of the Northern Ireland Committee and the Northern Ireland conference. These functions have in fact been in operation within the Irish T.U.C. without specific constitutional authority. The I.C.T.U. provisions therefore do not materially affect the position in Northern Ireland except insofar as they impose an obligation to continue the existing arrangements. These provisions of themselves, therefore, are unlikely in any way to affect the attitude of the Government of Northern Ireland, which does not recognise the Northern Ireland Committee or the Northern Ireland conference, even though all the members of the Committee are members of unions with headquarters in Britain, and the conference represents nearly every union in Northern Ireland.

There are several entirely new provisions relating to trade union organisation and inter-union disputes. A long paragraph, 44, empowers the Executive Council either on its own initiative or on receipt of a complaint, to investigate the conduct or action of an affiliated organisation which is alleged to be detrimental to the interests of Congress or affiliated organisations. After investigation, if a charge is proven, the Executive may call upon the organisation (1) to desist, (2) to take corrective action, (3) to comply with such conditions as may be required by the Executive. Failure to obey directions carries the penalty of suspension and possible expulsion.

The existing Congress provisions relating to the establishment of Disputes Committees to adjudicate on disputes between unions are re-enacted and strengthened (1) by the application to Disputes Committee reports of the sanctions contained in paragraph 44 (above), and (2) by new provisions setting out rules governing inter-union relations. These new provisions are considered further in the next following section.

To sum up: the new Congress, apart from restoring unity in the trade union centre, differs from the Irish T.U.C. of 1944 by developments designed to secure (1) control by the Irish membership, (2) provision of the more extended services required by the Irish membership, (3) special provisions for Northern Ireland, (4) provisions designed to secure better inter-union relations.

Trade Union Structure

I have already referred to the development of craft, industrial and general unions. One can more or less allocate unions into one or another of these categories, although in some cases the distinction becomes a bit blurred. In a recent article the "Economist" referred to two categories, the "broad front" unions organising a variety of different occupations and deriving their strength from size and from the non-involvement of the majority of their members in any one dispute, and the "narrow front" unions which followed a policy of securing the tight organisation

of specific kinds of worker, for whom they could secure special advantages without obligation to seek similar advantages for other categories of worker.

Apart from these, there are other theories and policies which have their influence within the trade union movement. I have referred to the short life of the early British attempt to establish a Grand National Consolidated Trade Union, yet the idea was carried on, an re-stated in this country by James Connolly, as follows :

“ The principle of complete unity upon the Industrial plan must be unceasingly sought after ; the Industrial union embracing all workers in each industry must replace the multiplicity of unions which now hamper and restrict our operations, multiply our expenses and divide our forces in face of the mutual enemy. With the Industrial Union as our principle of action, branches can be formed to give expression to the need for effective supervision of the affairs of the workshop, shipyard, dock or railway ; each branch to consist of the men and women now associated in Labour upon the same technical basis as our craft unions of today. Add to this the concept of one Big Union embracing all, and you have not only the outline of the most effective form of combination for industrial warfare today, but also for Social Administration of the Co-operative Commonwealth of the future.”

At the Irish T.U.C. in 1921 the delegates of the I.T.G.W.U. strongly urged the desirability of establishing one big union, whether it be the I.T.G.W.U. itself by a process of amalgamation, or whether it be the Irish T.U.C. itself becoming a union, to which its constituents would cede executive authority. In succeeding years better organisation was frequently discussed both in Britain and in Ireland. In Britain the Trades' Union Congress concluded that closer unity could most effectively be achieved by following rules designed to avoid friction (the Bridlington Agreement) and by the encouragement of a federal structure, where possible leading to amalgamation (Trade Union Structure and Closer Unity, British T.U.C.).

In 1936 the Irish T.U.C. established a Trade Union Commission which in 1939 presented three reports. One of these reports favoured the re-allocation of the membership of existing unions among a limited number of industrial unions, and a substantial strengthening of the executive powers of Congress. This is, indeed, in line with developments outside Britain. Such a structure might be directly compared to the American C.I.O., or to the structure of the trade union movement in the Scandinavian countries. When the West German trade union movement was reconstituted after the last war, it was reconstituted on this pattern. The growth of a trade union movement on these lines, or the establishment of a trade union movement where none exists, is a different question to the reallocation of the membership of an existing trade union movement. Opinion was fairly evenly divided on the desirability of this proposal, roughly one half of the affiliated unions, led by the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union, being in favour, and one half, including all the British-based unions, taking the

alternative view set out in the second and third reports that it was undesirable to create so great a disturbance of existing structure and of the personal loyalties which are so strong a factor in maintaining trade union organisation. In their view a more immediate requirement was the necessity of dealing with the problem of the multiplicity of small unions. They proposed as an alternative that the Irish T.U.C. should actively seek the amalgamation of unions, particularly the smaller unions.

The Trade Union Act of 1941 represented an attempt to secure reorganisation by Government action. This Act required all Irish unions to register, and all unions to report membership and other particulars to the Department. It also required them to lodge a minimum sum of £1,000 in court, a sum which could be reduced in the case of Irish unions. This requirement made the establishment of new unions or splinter groups more difficult but not impossible. There is no doubt that it has had some effect in preventing the unnecessary proliferation of breakaway groups and duplicate unions, although, if any group is sufficiently determined to form a new union, the lodgment is not an insuperable obstacle. It has had little or no effect in reducing the number of existing unions.

The third part of the Trade Union Act of 1941 was based on another theory, wellknown within the trade union movement, the theory of "sole organisation." It is recognised that where one union has organised all or most of the workers in a particular firm, it is bad practice for another union to move in and enrol a small or dissident group. The Act went further than trade union custom, however, and provided that where any Irish union organised a substantial majority of workers of any category it might apply to a tribunal which might grant it the sole right to organise workers of that category in the future. Following an action taken by the N.U.R. the Court ruled that this part of the Act was contrary to the provisions of the Constitution on Freedom of Association. It is notable that recently the present Minister for Industry and Commerce has indicated his view that it is preferable for the united Congress to deal with the problem of reorganisation than that a further attempt should be made to deal with it by legislation. The Minister's view is in harmony with the I.L.O. approach to trade union freedom, and should be welcomed by the trade union movement which should, at the same time, undertake the responsibility of guiding its membership towards the desired objective.

Freedom of association is a principle which is recognised by the United Nations as a basic human right, it is also recognised by the Constitution of Ireland. With specific reference to trade union organisations it is written into the Constitution of the I.L.O. It is also the subject of an important I.L.O. Convention, which has been ratified by this country, and the observance of the principle in all countries is the subject of study by a special committee of the I.L.O. on the assumption that where freedom of association is limited there can be no effective protection of workers' rights.

The I.L.O. Convention provides that workers and employers shall have the right to join the organisation of their choice. They shall have the right to draw up their own rules, and elect their

representatives and organise their administration without interference by the public authorities. They should not be liable to dissolution or suspension by the administrative authority. They should have the right to form and join confederations and to affiliate with international organisations. Their acquisition of legal personality should not be made subject to conditions which would restrict the application of these provisions.

The principle of freedom of association implies freedom not only to form or join, but also to limit associations. It is incorrect to interpret the principle as if it meant that any worker should have the right to join any union he chooses. Such an interpretation would be destructive of the whole basis of trade union organisation. It is the responsibility of unions and of the Congress to determine the limitations on the scope of organisation which individual unions should impose.

In 1953 the Irish T.U.C. held a special conference on organisation and the 1953 Congress approved a report of that conference which recommended that a permanent trade union commission be established to study the structure of the movement and to secure co-ordination by association, federation, amalgamation and transfer of members by unions organising workers within the same industry. The report further recommended that where a union consented, an appeals procedure should be established to adjudicate upon internal disputes which might otherwise be the cause of a breakaway.

As the discussions on unity between the C.I.U. and the Irish T.U.C. commenced shortly afterwards, these recommendations were not put into effect but instead, in 1954, as a temporary measure, the Irish T.U.C. adopted rules based on the British T.U.C. rules. These temporary rules were later incorporated in the Constitution of the I.C.T.U. They prohibit the acceptance by any union of members or ex-members of another union without consultation, or when the member is in arrears or under discipline. Enrolment of workers of any category in respect of which one union has already established its position as the sole negotiator, is also prohibited. Joint working agreements are advocated. These rules, like the 1941 Act, do not contribute anything positive towards the re-organisation of the trade union movement, but they are important in checking any drift towards unrestricted competition for membership.

In the course of the Unity discussions some consideration was given to a proposal that industrial groups be strengthened. Within the I.C.T.U. there is a group of unions with members in the E.S.B. which has its own committee and rules. Another has recently been formed to deal with the special problems of salaried workers. The Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions and the National Federation of Building Trade Operatives, which are independent of Congress, operate principally in Northern Ireland, and the Dublin Building Trades Group also operates independently of Congress. The provision in the Constitution of the I.C.T.U. for direct assistance to industrial groups should be of value in securing better co-ordination of unions within each industry.

The Irish T.U.C. proposal referred to earlier, for the establishment of a permanent Trade Union Commission, implied a recognition of the fact that the evolution of trade union organisation in the

future cannot be expected to follow a rigid preconceived pattern. Existing commitments and existing loyalties, together with a preference for the known, form a barrier against rapid change. The future form of organisation must be adjusted with the circumstances with which it has to deal. We can expect, however, a strengthening of the trade union centre, which will depend not only upon the fact that there will be only one centre, but on the provision of improved services by that centre. The stronger centre will encourage, rather than direct, a reduction in the number of unions and will assist in the evolution of a more logical form of organisation by encouraging the transfer of membership and the establishment of machinery for closer working together of unions. Its primary object, however, is "to uphold the democratic character and structure of the trade union movement, to maintain the right of Freedom of Association and the right of workers to organise and negotiate . . ." Final decisions on the structure of a free trade union movement must be made by the members themselves.

Trade Union Policies

The Congresses in Ireland, like the British T.U.C., are representative bodies. Congress policy is determined by the annual delegate meeting but, in the last analysis, the only sanction which Congress can impose upon a union which refuses to conform is the penalty of suspension or disaffiliation. The powers and functions of the trade union centres in other European countries and in America are generally stronger in relation to their constituent unions. It is, however, on a basis of loyalty and confidence, the custom of unions to observe and follow Congress policy.

In one important matter the Irish Congresses since the war have undertaken functions which are not performed by the British T.U.C. Since the "first round" of wage increases most of the succeeding "rounds" have been preceded by discussions between the F.U.E. and the two Congresses. These discussions led to agreements on general principles on four occasions. On one occasion no agreement was reached. The terms of the agreements varied from the firm "11s. agreement" in 1948 to a very general statement by the T.U.C. and F.U.E. in 1950. These agreements were in the form of recommendations to the constituent organisations and were followed by negotiations between unions and employers on the basis of the agreements. It was of course a great facility to unions and employers to have a headline clearly set before them and a very large number of increases were therefore negotiated quickly with relatively very few disputes.

It is possible, although by no means certain, that the "sixth round" may have been the last formal agreement. On the one hand the economic justification for dealing with wage increases in general formulae rather than in particularised negotiations, which would take account of variations between industries, has been questioned. The post-war "rounds" were of course caused by the continuous rise in the cost of living. While other factors such as payment for increased productivity were referred to, the in-

creases received were in fact more or less related to the fall in money values indicated by the Retail Price Index.

On the other hand, skilled workers have been critical in recent years of the effect of fixed rate increases or narrow differentials on their relative earnings. While the position of the skilled worker has relatively worsened, this has also occurred in Britain where national agreements followed by rounds of wage increases did not take place. In a survey of the ratios of wage rates of skilled workers to those of unskilled workers in 1938 and 1954, published in the *I.L.O. Review* in 1956, while the differentials for four classes of worker had diminished in Ireland in all cases, a greater diminution in differentials occurred in Britain in each case. An extract from this table is given hereunder :

RATIO OF SKILLED TO UNSKILLED WAGE RATES

| Country | Iron Moulder to Labourer | | Printer to Labourer | | Electrician to Labourer | | Carpenter to Labourer | |
|----------------|-----------------------------|------|------------------------|------|----------------------------|------|--------------------------|------|
| | 1938 | 1954 | 1938 | 1954 | 1938 | 1954 | 1938 | 1954 |
| Belgium | 1.23 | 1.25 | 1.71 | 1.05 | 1.21 | 1.21 | 1.24 | 1.25 |
| Denmark | 1.31 | 1.34 | 1.36 | 1.22 | — | — | 1.12 | 1.20 |
| Ireland | 1.32 | 1.29 | 1.63 | 1.33 | 1.46 | 1.31 | 1.35 | 1.21 |
| Italy | 1.33 | 1.13 | — | — | 1.28 | 1.33 | 1.30 | 1.13 |
| Netherlands .. | 1.30 | 1.19 | 1.36 | 1.31 | 1.05 | 1.21 | 1.08 | 1.22 |
| Norway | 1.23 | 1.13 | 1.59 | 1.28 | 1.32 | 1.21 | 1.03 | 1.05 |
| Sweden | 1.14 | 1.15 | 1.15 | 1.07 | 1.12 | 1.09 | 1.10 | 1.05 |
| Switzerland .. | — | — | 2.30 | 1.58 | 1.15 | 1.22 | 1.27 | 1.19 |
| United Kingdom | 1.33 | 1.20 | 1.35 | 1.23 | 1.32 | 1.22 | 1.33 | 1.19 |

In addition to the discussions on wages, agreements on a number of other aspects of trade union policy and action have been reached through the Congresses. Some of these are described hereunder.

An examination of the question of unofficial strikes by a working party consisting of representatives of the P.U.O., the F.U.E. and the Government resulted in a useful agreement.

The working party report was confined to agreed conclusions. Observations and suggestions which did not command the support of both employers' and workers' representatives were excluded. It noted that the causes of unofficial strikes were generally matters relating to working conditions, including supervision and worker management relations, as distinct from disputes concerning wages, which are the major cause of official strikes. The remedies suggested by the working party involved action not merely on the trade union side, but on the employers' side as well. The report stressed the importance of securing that supervisors on the one hand, and workers' representatives or shop stewards on the other hand, should be fully competent. There should be machinery to secure the early examination of grievances. Changes in methods of procedures which might affect conditions of working should be introduced with due regard to the workers' interest, and reasonable notice and explanation of such changes should be given. In

circumstances where a worker is immediately suspended or dismissed there should be provision for the early review, if necessary, of such action.

If an unofficial strike does happen the union concerned should not negotiate on behalf of the strikers until there is a resumption of work. Neither should the management negotiate with the strikers. One union reported that, after they had informed the strikers that they would not negotiate for them unless they returned to work, the management later informed them that they had negotiated a settlement with the Strike Committee. The report further recommended that the position of trade unions and management should not be undermined by third parties intervening to seek a settlement. Trade unions should not accept into membership any member of another union who was either engaged in an unofficial strike, or under discipline for participating in one. This point is now covered by the Constitution of the I.C.T.U.

This agreement, which was later approved by the annual meetings of the Congresses, can be divided into two parts. Obligations, mainly referring to trade unions, which are accepted when an unofficial strike occurs and, more important, obligations, mainly referring to management, to avoid the causes of unofficial strikes by providing adequate joint consultation and grievance machinery.

The importance of joint consultation has always been recognised by progressive employers, and in recent years has received a special emphasis in relation to measures directed towards securing increased productivity. The European Productivity Agency, for example, in its reports and publications has frequently drawn attention to the need for full consultation, particularly in firms where new methods or new machines are being introduced with a view to securing increased productivity. Machinery for consultation does exist in a number of establishments, but it is far from being general. One frequently hears the objection that the introduction of any effective form of consultation or the provision of adequate information would involve the abdication by management of some of its functions.

For a number of years the Irish T.U.C. and unions affiliated to the C.I.U. were among the bodies supporting the establishment of a productivity council. That Council has now been established within the past few months, and has commenced its preliminary work. It has the approval of the I.C.T.U. which nominates nine members to the Council, and the vice-chairman is an I.C.T.U. representative.

The views of the unions affiliated to the Irish T.U.C. on Payment by Results and Incentive Bonus Schemes were summarised in a report approved by that Congress in 1955. The report noted that the circumstances in Northern Ireland and the Republic were different, and that in the Republic, where a higher proportion of industrial production was of goods designed for the limited home market, it was understandable that payment by results schemes and any other schemes designed to increase productivity should be viewed with suspicion. Increased productivity may be shared with the workers by increased wages and reduced prices and used to provide more goods for a larger market—or it may be used

simply to reduce the labour force. So long as unemployment continues at a high level the report concludes that the workers' attitude was no more than reasonably prudent. Proposals for the introduction of systems of work and payment designed to increase output per worker should be critically examined, and satisfactory guarantees concerning employment should be made a condition of agreement to such proposals. Union members should be advised to consult their unions on new proposals by management, and unions should insist on being furnished with full information. Unnecessarily complicated systems of wage payment should be avoided and minimum fall-back earnings of workers should be increased where new machines or new techniques resulted in increased output. The right of management to undertake unilateral job evaluation should be limited and unions should make provision, where necessary, for the adequate training of shop stewards or other appropriate officials in checking job evaluations. The European Productivity Agency trade union section has made available to trade unions assistance and advice on trade union training schemes. Apart from their interest in securing improved general education for their members and their children, trade unions are directly interested in various kinds of education; education of their members to secure better understanding of trade union policies and objectives, education of members for office, whether part-time and honorary or full-time, specialised education of full-time officials. In Britain, the Scandinavian countries and a number of other European countries, Workers' Educational Associations exist as separate organisations to which trade unions affiliate and which provide education which may be on economic and social subjects, or cultural subjects, for their members. The British W.E.A. for example, is constituted of affiliated unions and affiliated branches. The branches are composed of the individual members attending courses, interested individuals and local trade union representatives. The governing body is elected by a conference to which affiliated unions and branches send delegates. Relationship has been established between the W.E.A. and a number of universities, and through the W.E.A., workers can attend courses which vary from short courses of evening lectures to three year university tutorial courses. Many of the affiliated trade unions provide scholarships for their members attending the longer courses, for summer schools and for international summer schools. Grants from the Government and Local Education authorities cover most of the cost of teaching. Income from students' fees and affiliation fees is therefore devoted to administration and organisation.

The British W.E.A., which is fairly typical, was taken as a model when the People's College was established by a number of unions in 1948. It provides short courses in a variety of subjects including elementary economics, social history and trade union studies. No government or other grants are received towards meeting the cost of these courses, but Foras Éireann grants cover the cost of lecturers' fees in certain cultural subjects such as literature, public speaking and appreciation of art and music. Residential week-end schools and summer schools are organised

each year, usually on a subject of current trade union interest. Most of the members attending these schools are either appointed by unions as delegates or are students attending weekly People's College lectures.

In arranging its week-end and summer schools on trade union subjects and in its Trade Union Studies lectures, the People's College has tried to supply the need for education of a specialised kind designed for active trade union members. In Britain a number of unions operate their own educational schemes for this purpose and, in addition, facilities are provided for union members through the National Council of Labour Colleges. A recent survey of educational schemes in Ireland conducted by unions affiliated to the Irish T.U.C., however, resulted in only five unions reporting the conduct of any educational activities in Ireland for Irish members, other than participation in People's College, N.C.L.C. or other such schemes. The five unions reported the organisation of one or more week-end schools for their members in Ireland. In the field of specialised trade union education, for example in work study, in addition to courses organised by the larger trade unions in Britain, facilities are provided by the education department of the British T.U.C. which provides both courses at their headquarters and travelling lecturers. No comparable facilities are available in Ireland. A beginning has been made by the organisation of a week-end school by the P.U.O. and, as noted earlier, the organisation of adequate educational facilities is set out as an objective in the constitution of the I.C.T.U. Trade unions also have a direct interest in the education of apprentices. In the course of recent discussions between representatives of the Department of Industry and Commerce, the F.U.E. and the I.C.T.U., agreement was reached on a number of recommendations relating to the introduction of new legislation on apprenticeship.

The Congress Annual Report covers a wide field of activity under the general headings of Organisation, Industrial Relations, Industrial Policy, Economic Policy, Social Welfare and Health, Education, Research and International Organisation. Resolutions coming before Congress may deal with any matter of concern to trade unionists in Northern Ireland or the Republic.

The annual congress meetings enable delegates from all unions, represented according to their size, to approve or amend the policies presented to them in the form of reports or resolutions.

The establishment of a united Congress is important in so far as it prevents any possibility of divergence on general policy, and concentrates the central resources of the movement in one organisation which it is hoped will be enabled thereby to implement the general policies of the trade union movement more effectively.

DISCUSSION

Mr. Maurice P. Gaffney said: As one who has studied Trade Union organisation in Ireland over a number of years as a work supererogation I have particular pleasure in welcoming this

paper of Mr. Roberts. As far as I am aware it is the only study of its kind made of the subject and printed to date. It is a most valuable contribution.

The figures for affiliated membership graphically reveal the growth of Trade Unionism in this country. If when studying them we bear in mind that during the years mentioned the population has been continually falling and the number of jobs in the country contracting the success of the Trade Union movement is shown in even more striking colours.

I thought it was a pity that Mr. Roberts in dealing with the educational activities of Trade Unions did not pay at least some tribute to the work that has been done on similar lines for the benefit of trade unionists by bodies outside the Trade Union movement. It is well known that great work has been done in this regard in Cork and of course in Dublin not only by the University but also by various other bodies.

Mr. Nevin's remarks on the straitened circumstances of Trade Union are very much in point when considering the work that the movement can undertake. Some years ago I estimated the income and total assets of the then existing two Congresses to represent about 5d. per member and 6d. per member represented respectively. With such income and such assets little can be expected from the Congresses. It is to be hoped that the financial circumstances of the new Irish Congress of Trade Unions will be sufficient to finance satisfactorily the ambitious programme set before it in its Constitution.

On the subject of figures I think it is a pity that the Report of the Registrar of Friendly Societies does not analyse further the figures it gives in relation to Trade Unions. For example in Table 2 under the heading "Manufacturers of Food, Drink and Tobacco" the total number of members at the end of the year 1955 is shown to be 5,514. The number of Trade Unions concerned in that figure is shown to be six. I would like to know the names of the six Unions concerned, the quota of the figure of 5,514 that belonged to each, the income, expenditure, general fund and political fund account in relation to each quota. I think such figures would be most illuminating and could easily be included in the Report even though admittedly they would make it so much bulkier.

Lastly, I am a little disappointed that the lecturer did not think fit to say anything about the political relations (if any) of the Trade Union movement in this country. In Britain the position is that the Trade Union movement is largely allied to one of the great Political Parties. The position in America is that the Trade Union movement holds aloof from politics. In this country we seem to have adopted a middle course. I was hoping to hear something from Mr. Roberts on this subject but perhaps he thought it might be invidious for him to deal with it.

I heartily endorse the tributes paid to the Lecturer and the vote of thanks.