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**No. 1**

**THE  
TRADE UNION  
MOVEMENT  
IN BELGIUM**

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Commission**

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## (1) INTRODUCTION.

This brief account does not claim to be a history of the Belgian Trade Union movement; its aim is more modest. It confines itself to offering the reader an opportunity of getting some idea of the way in which the movement first began, how it has developed, what its activities and structure are, the success it has achieved; and finally, what we may hope and expect for the future.

We have of course dealt more particularly with the *Trade Union Commission* <sup>(1)</sup> and the organisations connected with it. It has been a great honour to us to be able to share in the establishment of an organisation which, we may assert without fear of exaggeration and with legitimate pride, constitutes one of the finest bodies in the international army of organised workers of the I. F. T. U., which has its headquarters at Amsterdam.

We trust that our booklet will help to make the Belgian Trade Union movement better known among our foreign comrades. For the more we get to know about our neighbours and the better we learn to understand one another, the stronger will become the ties of comradeship which unite the organised workers throughout the world; and thus one day shall the new society which we are making patient and strenuous efforts to construct be fully realised.

CORN. MERTENS.

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(1) The Trade Union Commission is the body which corresponds in Belgium to the British Trades Union Congress.

## (2) THE FORERUNNERS OF THE BELGIAN TRADE UNION MOVEMENT.

### A) THE GUILDS AND TRADE CORPORATIONS.

The Guilds and Corporations which, after having survived the collapse of the ancient régime, continued their existence right up to the 18th century, are generally considered to be the forerunners of the modern Trade Union movement. They were to be found almost exclusively in the Flemish provinces, and were for the most part composed of both masters and workmen; but whereas the Guilds organised the unskilled workmen, the Trade Corporations grouped together the skilled artisans.

It was chiefly at Bruges, Ghent, Lierre, Malines and Furnes that these organisations flourished. In many cases the number of members was limited, each having at their head the "doyens" so-called, according to their grade either "upper doyen", "doyen" or "under-doyen". Members received a fixed daily wage for their work, and in addition also received a proportion of the profits, which in some cases amounted to considerable sums. It happened sometimes—as in the case of the task-workers at Ghent—that workers were taken on who were really outside the range of the Guild. At Bruges the carriers of corn, lime, coal and beer were chiefly to be found; at Ghent the task-workers whose business was to load and unload ships; at Lierre, porters and wheelbarrow men; at Malines, the cask-porters; at Furnes, the bag-porters and ordinary porters.

The Trade Corporations existed in the principal Flemish towns, and, as has already been noted, they included only skilled artisans. Many of them owned their own corporative houses, where their meetings were held; and they had each their own distinctive banners and standards. The records and the archives have been so carefully preserved that it is possible to trace the history of the organisation right from the very

beginning. Many of these records, banners and standards, are still to be seen in the communal museums at the places where these groups formerly existed.

#### B) THE TRADE CLUBS FOR MUTUAL ASSISTANCE.

Quite apart from the Guilds and Corporations there were also institutions called Trade Clubs for Mutual Assistance. At the beginning these too were mixed, the original idea being that they should include employers and workers alike in the same trade; but the employers gradually dropped out, and finally the membership consisted entirely of workmen. The object of these Societies (which were also to be found chiefly in Flanders) was to give assistance in cases of incapacity for work. They were for the most part of a markedly confessional nature; they celebrated funerals and masses for their dead, as laid down by their regulations. Some of these societies are to be found here and there up to this day, but the majority of the members are workers belonging to a modern Trade Union. It is at Ghent that we find the first traces of them. The tailors in this locality formed their society in 1805, the shoemakers in 1807, the printers in 1808, the locksmiths, carpenters and woodworkers in 1809. Later on there were actually various militant organisations arising out of some of these societies.

#### C) THE SOCIETIES OF RESISTANCE.

Then came the first real Societies of Resistance, which, because of the Anti-Combination Law, were compelled to keep the militant nature of their organisations a secret. It was for this reason that they adopted the name "Societies for the Maintenance of Prices". The first trace of them is about 1840.

At this time the workers engaged in industry, which was now steadily developing, were inert and apathetic, and completely in the power of their employers. Factory workers, such as Hatters, Gold and Silver-smiths, Printers etc., who were better trained and better paid, were, however, beginning to

realise the necessity of combination for the purpose of bettering their condition. Their Societies for the Maintenance of Prices were organised more or less according to their crafts, so that one might almost use the word "Craft" unions to describe their organisations. Their chief features were:— (1) complex institutions and merely general aims; (2) a tendency to ensure monopoly, and the restriction of the number of members in each trade; (3) a very marked tendency to autonomy.

The Hatters' Societies were the most advanced of all; they included the felt-cutters, fullers, felt and silk-hat-workers. All of these groups had formerly been organised independently, but were later on amalgamated to form one single organisation. Most of the other societies have subsequently gone through various phases of evolution, passing from the early kind of grouping to the organisation of "Trade Clubs for Mutual Assistance", and finally re-forming themselves into Societies of Resistance. The Societies were governed by the very strictest rules. Payment had to be made for the right of entry, and subscriptions were very high, and even then only brothers or sons of members were admitted. In 1853 rules were formulated to govern the time of apprenticeship, age of admission into the trades, etc. In the same year the "viaticum" or journey money was instituted, by arrangement with the sister-organisation in Paris.

There are three of these "Societies for the Maintenance of Prices" which are deserving of special mention. In the first place, that of the Brussels Compositors and Printers, founded in the year 1842, on January 3rd, which shares with the Society of Hatters the distinction of being the oldest in Belgium. It remains at heart the most independent section of the Belgian Federation of Typographers, and has indeed changed very little of its method of work and action, particularly in regard to its internal organisation. Although it would be somewhat rash to assert that it is a continuation of the Sick-Club for Printers founded in 1820, a section of which seceded in

1832, yet it is quite permissible to say that it is at any rate a descendant of that institution. Its constitution stated its aim to be "to ensure the workers against unemployment and to guard them *legally* against any sort of abuse on the part of their employers." This group, which did some very valuable work, was the first trade association in Belgium. Like that of the Hatters, it went into the question of apprenticeship at an early date. In view of the fact that their leaders had to suffer considerably under the Anti-Combination Law we are not surprised to find the Printers in the forefront of the organised workers in the struggle for the abolition of this mischievous law.

After the Printers of Brussels it is well to mention the Ghent Weavers and Spinners, each of which built up their own organisation. The Spinners had already previously formed a tentative sort of organisation. In November 1814 they had up an association which had for its object "the provision for members in case of illness, old age or death". The regulations were approved on November 23rd, 1814, but the organisation was prohibited on February 3rd, 1815 by the burgomaster of the city of Ghent, as a result of the intervention of a powerful employer. The new organisation set up in 1857 was also, right from the beginning, consistently attacked by the employers. The Weavers' Association had made an appeal to the solidarity of the Textile Workers of Roubaix, for funds to maintain their movement and in reply they had received a sum of 91 francs 88. The letter of thanks which they sent fell into the hands of the authorities, and all the leaders of the Weavers' Association were arrested, forty workers (spinners and weavers) were implicated in the trial, the result of which was that the president and vice-president of the weavers were both condemned to 10 years' imprisonment, while 28 of the other accused received sentences varying from 8 days to 3 months. We shall refer again later on to the "Broederlijke Wevers" (the Weavers' Fraternity), which gave rise to the "Vooruit" (Advance) Society which is so powerful to-day.

Finally we must mention the Brussels Cigar Factory Workers' Association, founded September 28th, 1868, which in its Constitution described its activities as follows:—"to endeavour by all the legal means possible to maintain the rate of wages, without in any way infringing the laws which govern us". The rules of the Association were very strict; it absolutely prohibited its members from helping workers outside its ranks to procure employment in the trade. The liberty of members was defined as follows:—"Members are free to work in any factories where they shall receive the wages fixed by the association, so long as this is not forbidden them by the rules." Emile Vandervelde wrote in 1891 that he had noticed with great surprise that, according to the conception of some workers, liberty meant:—"The power to be able to do what is not forbidden by the law"!

The example set by the Hatters, Printers, and the Ghent Spinners and Weavers was rapidly followed by workers in other trades. In succession the Gold and Silver-Smiths, the Bronze workers, Glovers, Lithographers, Cigar Makers, Woodworkers, Ornament workers, Tailors, Metal workers, and Verviers Textile workers, set up militant unions. Right from the beginning they made the first point on their programme the maintenance of wages. It seems as if those who drew up the regulations were possessed by the thought:—"Since we are bound by the Anti-Combination Law, it should be made quite clear to the authorities that the aims we intend to pursue are pacific". The Verviers groups, however, were more advanced in character. They all became affiliated to the "International" in February 1873, and proposed to all the groups of Belgian workers then existing that they should follow their example, that is to say, use the cash they had in hand for energetic propaganda work for the furtherance of the social revolution.

#### D) THE KNIGHTS OF LABOUR.

The group known as the Knights of Labour was another form of militant union, which first saw the light in 1880 and



the following years. This Society was begun under the influence and example of the Knights of Labour of the United States. It arose in the Charleroi region, where the glass-workers formed a union in 1883 which played an important part politically and economically and was, until 1886 (the year of the famine riots) the centre of the proletarian organisation in that region. Numerous sections of the Knights of Labour, similarly constituted, were formed in various trades. These groups had in their turn adopted the secret usages of the American Knights of Labour; but in this form their existence has not always stood the test of time. Until the outbreak of the world war in 1914 the miners of Charleroi still called themselves Knights of Labour on their letter-heading, though they had as a matter of fact discarded the customs and usages of their early beginnings long since.

### (3) OBSTACLES TO BE OVERCOME.

For ten years the organised workers of Belgium fought to remove all the obstacles of a legal nature which stood in their path. Hundreds of leaders have been thrust into prison for having ventured to bring some alleviation to the lot of the working classes by preaching unity and by means of the "combination" which was anathema in the eyes of the law.

The legal obstacles which the workers were endeavouring to remove had their origin in the decree of 14—17th June 1791, i. e. at the time of the French domination, when, on the pretext that the corporations and combinations of citizens of the same trade had been abolished, they forbade them to re-organise their societies in any form or for any reason whatsoever; and neither workers nor employers were allowed to arrange among themselves the price of their work. This decree, also known as the Chapelier law, was later on incorporated into the Penal Code of 1810, as articles 414, 415, and 416. The first of these articles concerned employers, and any

breach in its observance was punishable by imprisonment from 6 days to 1 month, and a fine of 200/3000 francs. The two other articles concerned the workers. Article 415 made the combination of workers punishable by imprisonment for a period from one to three months, while the leaders and agitators were to be sentenced to imprisonment from two to five years.

Article 416 imposed the same penalty as the preceding article on workers who impeded the smooth running of work by speaking against employers etc.

Leaders and agitators might, moreover, after they had served their sentence, be placed under the surveillance of the special police, for any length of time not less than 2 years and not more than 5 years.

When the Belgian State was definitely constituted in 1831, it adopted the provisions of the Penal Code of 1810 and made them part of the new Code.

In its early beginnings the Belgian Constitution guaranteed the liberty of association (in articles 19 and 20); but the workers who took advantage of this and attempted to better their lot were inexorably sentenced under the Anti-Combination Law. The struggle against the latter finally came to a head in 1866, and on March 22nd of that year Parliament began to debate the substitution of other provisions for this law. On March 30th two new articles were voted and sent to the Senate for ratification, but they were not, however, finally considered by the latter body until February 27th 1866. One was rejected, and the other adopted as article 310. This punished with imprisonment from 8 days to 3 months and a fine of 26/1000 francs all those who, with the object of increasing or reducing wages, tried to prevent work from going on freely. This article was promulgated on May 31st 1866 in the form of a special law, but it was further amended by the law of May 30th, 1892. This amendment, brought in while the impression produced by the

famine riots was still strong in people's minds, modified the terms of the penal measures provided in article 310. The sentence of imprisonment was altered to a minimum of 1 month to 2 years, and the fine to a minimum of 50 francs and a maximum of 1000 francs. This article was never applied at all to employers; but was on the other hand always applied to the workers, and that with the greatest stringency. It was not therefore surprising that the working class should henceforth realise the importance of doing everything that lay in its power to get the article annulled, since it constituted a very grave obstacle to the development of the Trade Unions, which were so unceasingly persecuted,—ordinary members as well as leaders. The struggle went on for nearly 30 years before the Trade Unions were successful in getting this fatal law struck off the code. It was in November 1918 that the Belgian Labour Party was asked to participate in the government, and they accepted on the following conditions: universal suffrage; the repeal of article 310; and entire freedom of association, both for workers of the public services and for workers in private industry.

The conditions were accepted, and the promise kept. On May 18th, 1921, Parliament did actually repeal article 310, and the same day passed a law which not only guaranteed freedom of association but also penalised attempts to interfere with it in practice by making such offences punishable by imprisonment from 8 days to a month, and a fine of 50 to 500 francs, or both sentences together.

Thus were removed the last obstacles which partisan legislation had for so many years placed in the way of the free activity of the Trade Union movement in Belgium.

#### (4) THE NEW EPOCH.

##### A) AFTER THE ANTI-COMBINATION LAW.

The Anti-Combination Law had then been repealed on May 31st 1866 and replaced by article 310, so famous in the annals

of Belgian Labour. From that time we see new trade union organisations springing up here and there, until by 1873 a considerable number of Societies of Resistance had been formed. For some time after that, however, there was another period of reaction.

In 1880 the Flemish Socialist party was formed, and on April 5th, 1885, it amalgamated with the other Labour groups in the country to form the Belgian Labour Party.

That event was the starting-point of a new era for the Trade Union movement. The leaders of the newly formed party were unanimous in the opinion that the Trade Unions should as far as possible work with a view to affiliation with the Labour Party, and persuade their members to accept Socialist ideas. A new propaganda was therefore organised, which for that time was remarkably comprehensive. New Trade Union organisations were set up, affiliated for the most part to the Labour Party. Those which already existed were reconstructed and re-formed in accordance with the new plan of Trade Union action which had been formulated under the influence of Socialism. In 1894 the first Socialist deputies entered Parliament, and it was as a result of their influence that we find about this time new social laws being introduced. The Law for the Incorporation of Trade Unions was promulgated on March 31st 1898. This legal recognition accorded them:—(1) a limited right of ownership; (2) civil incorporation; (3) the right to accept gifts and legacies; (4) the right to accept subsidies for initial expenses, and also annual subsidies. They on their side were to submit a list of their members; and it was forbidden them (1) to affiliate with a political party; (2) to draw subscriptions from their members destined to be used for political purposes, or to deduct money from the ordinary subscriptions for this purpose; (3) to carry on political propaganda or to take part in elections; (4) to nominate candidates at the elections. At the Congress of the Belgian Labour Party held at Verviers on April 10/11th 1898 this new legislation relative to the Trades Unions came up for discussion. As the latter

were not compelled to submit to legal recognition, the Congress, finding it impossible to accept the conditions laid down, decided to advise the Trade Unions which accepted the principle of the class war not to ask for legal recognition at all.

The Congress also came to another decision, of greater importance. Up to that time the Trade Unions, such as they were, had been, so to speak, strangers to one another, and, even within the limits of each individual craft, had not had the least connection with one another. The leaders of the party, among whom were many leaders of the Trade Unions, realising the evils of this situation, came to the conclusion that it was full time not only to bring about some sort of unity in their activities, but also to create some means to maintain contact between the unions.

It was for this reason that the Congress decided to set up a Commission of Trade Unions, (later known as the Trade Union Commission), the members of which were to be nominated by the General Council of the Belgian Labour Party. The Trade Union movement would thus for the future have an organisation at its head whose sole business would be the pursuit of its interests and the promotion of its unity and further development.

#### B) THE TRADE UNION COMMISSION.

The General Council of the Belgian Labour Party was, then, entrusted by the Congress with the task of setting up a Trade Union Commission, which to begin with was really only a sort of research commission. At this time the Congress of the Belgian Labour Party was as a matter of fact so fully occupied with questions of a political nature that it could not give the necessary attention to economic problems. The new body supplied this need.

The Trade Union Commission was appointed on 4th July 1898, and was composed of comrades Aerts, Duporte, Maes and Wauters (all since deceased), and Dewinne, Elbers, Hallet, Octors and Vandervelde. In addition to these there were the delegates from the nine district Trade Union Federations

existing at that time round about Brussels. Of these nine Secretaries, G. Solau has been a member of the Commission right from the beginning and has since 1911 occupied the position of President.

The Commission adopted as a basis of work the plan which had been drawn up in the previous year by the Congress of the Party. It defined its aims as follows:—

“To collect all information relative to industries and trades in Belgium and abroad, in so far as such information concerns employers and workers,—which information shall afterwards be held at the disposal of the various groups.

To further the formation of Trade Unions and Federations with the help of this information.

To collect all information relative to our economic programme, to examine this in its relation to the principles of Socialism, and finally to publish the same. The Commission shall study with particular care the various forms of Trade Union organisation, and determine which form or forms are the most favourable to the progress of Trade Associations.”

The first practical task which the Commission took in hand was to establish closer connections between local Trade Unions of the same trade. Its first achievement in this direction was the constitution in October of the same year of a National Union of Textile Workers.

In addition to this, propaganda work was begun, and for this purpose permanent secretaries in the Trade Unions were appointed and an extensive library was acquired for each group. It may be said without fear of exaggeration that the efforts made in the furtherance of these three aims have exercised a considerable influence on the Belgian Trade Union movement.

The Commission made appeal to the Unions and Friendly Societies to affiliate with the “Trade Union Commission section of the General Council of the Belgian Labour Party”, but the support given was not very considerable, and, as the subscription only amounted to 2 centimes per member per year,

the Party was for some years obliged to make over a certain sum of money to meet the expenses of the Commission. Gradually, however, the Trade Union Commission increased its membership. Since 1899 it has held a Congress every year, at Christmas. The Trades Union Congress held in 1904 set to work to draft a constitution, which was actually adopted on January 1st 1905. From that time onwards only Trade Unions could affiliate with the Trade Union Commission.

Although founded by the Belgian Labour Party, and having indeed for some years formed a section of that party, the Trade Union Commission had from the outset admitted all Unions to its membership, which admitted the principle of the class-war, even though they were independent of political parties. But notwithstanding the fact that the Trade Union Commission had a constitution of its own and had its own work, and in spite of the fact that it became more and more independent and autonomous, yet there persisted for a long time a certain mistrust among the members of the independent unions, who in spite of everything, at heart suspected the Trade Union Commission of being a political body, or at any rate, of being dependent on the Belgian Labour Party. This mistrust was all the greater because of the sharp differences of opinion as to whether the unions ought to be affiliated to the political Labour Party, or to remain independent. These differences led to sharp struggles, even in the Commission itself, and also between the Trade Union organisations in the region of Anvers and Verviers. In the former of these two centres the struggle was ended in 1907 by a split within the Trade Union movement, which was, however, repaired again in 1910.

But these differences of opinion have now entirely disappeared. There is complete co-operation, and the unions no longer discuss affiliation or non-affiliation to the Party. If the Trade Union Commission is considered as the economic expression of the Trade Unions in the sphere of class-war, the

Trade Unions no less consider the Belgian Labour Party to be the representative and defender of the working classes in the political sphere.

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Having accomplished this primary task of grouping the unions together, the Commission then set itself to bring about a better organisation of all the adherent groups. In 1908 it began an energetic propaganda in favour of centralisation. Rejected the first time by the workers in the Building Trade, this form of organisation, then quite new in Belgium, was subsequently adopted, and put into operation in 1909. Factory workers, tobacco workers, and coach makers soon afterwards followed suit.

Hesitation still remained, however. It was for this reason that in 1911 the Commission organised two tours to Berlin for the purpose of studying on the spot the great advantages of the method of organisation, which was in working there. The hoped-for results were obtained. From that moment the Unions one after the other accepted this centralised organisation; its adoption was indeed so general that the Trade Union Congress in 1914 decided that henceforth only national organisations should be allowed to affiliate to the Commission—a measure which did not fail to exercise a strong influence on the groups which had not already centralised.

But the main concern of the Commission was the organisation of Labour solidarity, in preparation for any struggles in which one or other of the unions might be implicated. The expression of this solidarity took various forms. The first method was to give assistance in the form of subsidies drawn from the funds of the various unions or the result of collections and subscriptions. Then it sometimes also happened that loans were made to organisations engaged in actual struggle; and finally, in cases of prolonged conflict, it was arranged for strikers' children—and later on even the strikers' themselves—to receive hospitality from workers in other districts.



### (5) THE TRADE UNION COMMISSION DURING THE WAR.

The efforts made by the Commission from 1898 to 1914 began at last to meet with success. The affiliated organisations came to recognise the authority of the central organisation, and the Belgian Trade Union movement was able to act as one united whole.

Although it was but little known outside certain circles, the Trade Union Commission was not afraid to organise a general action, when need arose. The first—rather tentative—step which it took in this direction was in 1913—1914, when the Ministry of Labour of that time brought in a measure to make arbitration compulsory, unions which refused to submit and appealed to solidarity being made liable to punishment. The result of the action taken by the Commission and the Socialist Parliamentary group was that the Bill met with an unfavourable reception in both sections of the Chamber. This was the first success gained in this sphere.

Then the War came, and paralysed the movement for more than four years. From the early days of August 1914 the number of unemployed increased so formidably that it became impossible to provide assistance for them from the funds of the Trade Unions. Very many of the members were called to arms and every activity of the organisations came practically to a standstill. Shortly afterwards came the foreign occupation and contact between trade unions of the different district of the country became impossible.

In the big centres there did remain, however, a modicum of liberty of action. Happily for our movement, the leaders, with very few exceptions, remained at their posts, in spite of the difficulties of the times. The "National Committee for Assistance and Provisions", organised in conjunction with the Belgian Government and American charity, offered a useful sphere of action to the leaders, who were thus able to render

immense services to their supporters in particular and to the working class population in general.

They continued as well as they could the work of educating the workers in anticipation of the future. Whether or not they had the consent of the occupying authorities, they organised meetings in the large centres of the country to discuss and prepare for the tasks that would lie before them after the war. It was certainly the activity of the Belgian Trade Union movement during this critical time that made possible the defence of the workers' interest immediately after the conclusion of the Armistice. We may note in passing that on the occasion of the scandalous transportation of our unemployed and others of our comrades by the occupying authorities in 1916 and 1917, the Trade Union Commission issued a strong protest against this unjustifiable behaviour; the protest rapidly became known beyond the frontiers, and helped, if not to put an end to the transportations, at least to diminish them considerably.

### (6) THE POST-WAR PERIOD.

As we have said above, effective preparation had been made for the post-war period; and, immediately after the conclusion of the Armistice, the various unions, as well as the Trade Union Commission itself, were able to set to work.

On the 17th November 1918 the last German troops left the capital, and on the 25th of the same month the National Committee of the Trade Union Commission met again in full force. A resolution was passed then which has had such far-reaching effects and has exercised so great an influence on the subsequent development of the movement, that we think it indispensable to devote a few lines to it here.

After duly considering what measures the situation demanded, the Commission went into the question of how best it could get at the workers. It was decided to address a manifesto to the working class of the country, and copies of this were widely circulated throughout Belgium some days later,

thousands of posters being put up all over the country. This manifesto advised the workers not to resume their occupations until they were assured of an eight hours' working day; an increase in the rate of wages of 100% over pre-war rates, with a minimum of 1 franc per hour for an unskilled worker and 1 franc 25 centimes per hour for skilled workers; and also, the recognition of the Trade Unions by the employers.

This manifesto made a powerful impression on the country, particularly among the workers. It was no voice crying in the wilderness, but a voice that found a sure echo in the hearts and minds of the workers. For four long wretched years they had undergone misery and privation, and now suddenly they heard this word of hope and cheer, and saw opening up before their eyes a happier, and therefore a better life. Suddenly the Trade Union Commission figured largely in the public eye and gained ground with the workers, while the proletariat looked towards it full of hope for the future. The workers joined the Unions en masse, giving the movement a power and force such as even the most enthusiastic and optimistic had never dared to hope for or even to conceive of in the days of the great hecatomb.

On January 11th and 12th, 1919, the Trade Union Congress held its sessions. In the pleasure of the reunion the delegates made no difficulty about the course taken during the previous four years, and began with enthusiasm to set about making elaborate plans for the future campaign of the Commission, and the reformation of its methods of action.

Instead of constituting, as previously, merely a link between the various Trade Union centres in the country, and an organisation making timid efforts to bring the affiliated centres to realise the necessity of more effective action, the Commission now found itself possessed of very much greater influence and of undisputed authority. And that not only with the Trade Unions, but with the employers and the Government. It had gained the confidence of the working class and at the same time acquired economic and even political power.

The affiliated organisations evidently had the greatest respect for the opinions and attitude of the Commission in important and difficult circumstances; the Government, in the person of the Socialist Ministers, consulted it of its own accord on all questions which concerned the workers. In brief, the former situation was entirely changed, and they were able to look to the future with more confidence than ever.

### (7) THE ERA OF ACHIEVEMENTS.

The victories which were realised as a result of this new situation in which the Commission found itself may be considered under two separate headings:—firstly, achievements in the domain of Trade Unionism and practical life; and secondly, work done in the sphere of legislation.

Signal victories were gained in the sphere of Trade Unionism, with the result that in a very short time the workers succeeded in gaining the 8-hour day, and the employers conceded fair and decent wages.

The employers were also constrained—in contradistinction to their former attitude—to recognise the workers' organisations. An example, taken from among many others, will serve to show the full significance of this moral victory in the Labour world. Before the war the employers in the Mining Industry had obstinately refused to recognise the Miners' Union; they would only negotiate with their own workers. In 1915, during the world war, direct negotiations were opened for the first time. It was not until after the war, however, that written communications took place, these being started by Wauters, the Minister of Labour, and the Administration of the Mines. A short time afterwards a Mixed Commission of the Mining Industry was formed by Wauters. This commission, in which the workers enjoyed equal representation with the employers, drew up a convention to regulate the conditions of labour and the colliers' wages.

Before the war hundreds of the workers in the Metal Industry were compelled in certain undertakings to give up their

certificates of Trades Union membership, which were burned one fine day in a heap in the yard of the building. After the war two mixed commissions were set up in this industry, to regulate wages and conditions of labour.

In numerous other branches of industry similar mixed commissions were set up, and it may be affirmed without fear of contradiction that they have up to the present played an important part in the economic life of Belgium. Each in its particular branch of industry has had a considerable influence, and has achieved substantial improvements for the workers; while on the other hand, by avoiding strikes, they have contributed greatly to stabilise industrial peace. These commissions, set up by royal decree and presided over, as they were, by a sociologist or some important functionary, had an official character which could not but add to the prestige of the Commission.

We think it will not be without interest to set down here a list of the various commissions which have been set up from time to time, according to the branch of industry with which they dealt:—

*Building Industries.*

- a) Builders proper.
- b) Furniture makers.
- c) Brush factory workers.

*Food and Drink Trades.*

- a) Bakers (2 sections).
- b) Butchers.
- c) Hotels, Cafés, Restaurants (2 sections).

*Glass industries.*

- a) Mirror manufacturers.
- b) Cup and goblet manufacturers.

*Metal Industries.*

- a) Metallurgy.
- b) Minor mechanic work.

**Mining Industry.**

- a) Colliery workers.

**Public Services.**

- a) Gas and electricity.

**Textile industries.**

- a) Weaving industry, for Flanders alone.
- b) Flax Industry, for Flanders alone.
- c) Spinning mills (cotton and wool).
- d) Spinning mills (flax and hemp).
- e) Bleaching, finishing and dyeing ; embroidery.

**Transport industries.**

- a) Tramways.
- b) Local railways.
- c) Harbour workers and chauffeurs.

The victories gained in the sphere of legislation were not less cheering. Here the Commission succeeded in abolishing the unpopular Article 310, and laws were passed concerning (1) the freedom of combination, (2) the 8-hour day, (3) old age pensions, (4) funds for larger scholarships for gifted children, (5) cheap dwellings, (6) collective agreements. For the rest, one might mention the official subsidies for unemployment relief, the institution of the "Emergency Fund", the re-establishment and democratisation of the Upper Council of Labour (Conseil Supérieur du Travail).

The international economic crisis which is weakening the workers' organisations, also the withdrawal of the four Socialist ministers from the Government in 1921, has for the time being brought to a standstill the progress of the reforms advocated by the Trade Unions.

## (8) THE CONSTITUTION OF THE TRADE UNION COMMISSION.

### A) ITS AIMS AND ACTIVITIES.

As we have already said, the Commission of Trade Unions (later known as the "Trade Union Commission") became much

more autonomous after January 1905, when it drew up its constitution. This was modified in 1907, when it was decided to add to the members of the Bureau of the Trade Union Commission who were nominated by the Trade Union Congress, two delegates from the General Council of the Belgian Labour Party; while the Trade Union Commission on its side received the same representation on the Executive of the General Council. This meant that the Commission, which had a greater amount of liberty after 1905, became completely independent of the General Council of the Belgian Labour Party, while at the same time close practical collaboration between the two organisations was continued.

The rules were again amended on the occasion of the Trade Union Congress held in July 1914. Except for one or two alterations which have been necessitated by the force of circumstances, they have remained unaltered since then.

Article 2 of the constitution defines the aims and activities of the Trade Union Commission as follows:—

- a) To establish a link between the Trade Union organisations of the country, which acknowledge and carry on the class-war.
- b) To strengthen the Trade Union Movement by such means as it shall think fit; to work for the material and intellectual emancipation of the proletariat, the suppression of the exploitation of the workers, and the socialisation of the means of production. To encourage and develop the sense of working-class solidarity.
- c) To publish a periodical official organ, the "Belgian Trade Union Movement" (1). To collect, edit and ultimately publish statistics, reviews, pamphlets, etc. which be of service to the labour movement".

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(1) This organ is published in French and Flemish. It appeared before the war under the name of "Correspondence Journal", first published in 1903.

- d) To agitate for the promulgation of good Labour legislation and to keep watch on its strict application.
- e) To encourage the establishment of local or district federations of the Trade Unions in conjunction with the divisional federations of the Labour Party: to render assistance in the event of National Centres concluding mutual agreements, relative to the organisation of the workers, and to help in any action in which workers of various unions, are involved.
- d) To ensure a closer collaboration with similar organisations in other countries by affiliation with the I. F. T. U., of which this Commission constitutes the Belgian section.
- h) To study all questions relative to the workers; to help and advise in the direction of the Trade Union movement.
- i) To provide assistance and advice in the establishment of new Trade Unions, and for the institution and re-organisation of benefit funds in the Trade Unions.
- j) To settle any differences or conflicts that may arise between the affiliated organisations.
- k) To fix the lines of demarcation between the Trade Unions.
- l) To render assistance in the conduct of movements for wages and similar movements, and of strikes or lock-outs; and if need be, to issue national appeals for financial assistance.

As paragraph (a) of this article expresses it, the Commission groups together "national" trade organisations. That is to say, local or district groups can no longer be admitted, unless the industry with which they are concerned is strictly local or regional in character.

This principle has been applied since the resumption of activities after the war, so that the 29 organisations at pre-



sent affiliated, whether national unions or federations of unions, extend or can extend their activities throughout the country.

Each affiliated organisation preserves its autonomy, but is bound in all that concerns the general action by the decisions of the Trade Union Congress and the National Committee of the Trade Union Commission. Since the Armistice it has gone even further, and at the congresses and meetings of the National Committee of the Commission such decisions have been taken as are assuredly wider in their application than the rules actually provide for. For instance, on the occasion of many important conflicts it has been decided that each member should pay a definite extra contribution for a certain number of weeks. There has not been a single organisation which has refused to do this duty. When in 1922 the French General Confederation of Labour made appeal to the Trade Union Commission to grant a loan in favour of the daily "Le Peuple", the National Committee decided on the collection of a special contribution of 25 centimes per member. The decision which the Trade Union Congress of 1924 took on this subject of Trade Union discipline was also very important. The actual text of this decision reads as follows :—

"The Congress, etc.

Declares it to be the duty of all the organisations affiliated to the Trade Union Commission to take expedient measures to suppress all strife in their midst, and to take drastic steps against all those who, under any pretext whatsoever, stir up troubles and strife in their ranks.

The Congress further declares that no member, to whatever trade union he may belong, has the right to interfere in the business of another organisation, either in connection with internal or general matters ; that is, unless he is expressly requested to do so by organised bodies, such as the Congresses, the Central or National Committee, or by an arrangement between the Trade Union Commission and the other organisation.

Moreover, in view of the struggle which is being carried on by the Communist International and its affiliated parties

against the I. F. T. U. at Amsterdam and its affiliated groups ; and in view of the means which the former are using to divide and weaken the existing organisations, and the fact that members of the Communist Party are bound in blind obedience to share in this abominable task :—

It is of the opinion that the duties of a leader of a modern Trade Union affiliated with the Trade Union Commission—whatever his rank may be—are incompatible with membership of the Communist Party ; and that such duties should not therefore be entrusted to one who, because he is a member of the Communist Party, is compelled to work against the I. F. T. U. and, “ipso facto”, against the Trade Union Commission.

It calls upon its affiliated organisations to take measures to ensure the full execution and application of paragraphs 3 and 6 of the present resolution ;

It calls upon the Executive and the National Committee of the Trade Union Commission to watch over the execution and application of such measures.”

#### B) THE EXECUTIVE.

There is an Executive at the head of the Trade Union Commission, composed of 14 members :—9 elected annually by the Congress, 2 representing the Bureau of the General Council of the Labour Party, and also the Secretary General and the 2 assistant secretaries of the Trade Union Commission. The members have full voting powers.

The Executive undertakes the general management of the Commission, and has in its hands the decision of matters of principle, as well as the direction of general activities. It supervises the application of the rules, the execution of the decisions of the Trades Union Congress as well as those of the National Committee. It also convokes the latter and prepares the agenda for its meetings.

The Executive of the Trade Union Commission meets as frequently as circumstances necessitate. Moreover it possesses the right of acting on its own initiative in all cases of an ur-

gent character which are not provided for by the rules, always of course on the condition that it exercises its right in accordance with the spirit of the rules and decisions of the Congress.

#### C) THE NATIONAL COMMITTEE.

After the Executive we come to the National Committee of the Trade Union Commission. It is made up as follows : (1) All the members of the Executive ; (2) the delegates from the affiliated groups ; (3) a delegate from each Trades Council ; (4) a delegate from the Workers' Educational Centre.

As far as the delegations from the affiliated organisations are concerned, they have the right to send one delegate for 25,000 members to 100,000 members inclusive and one extra delegate for each 50,000 members above this number.

The members of the Executive and the delegates from the affiliated organisations have full voting powers, the delegates of the Trade Union federations and the Centre of Workers' Education have a consultative vote.

The powers of the National Committee include the admission or non-admission of new Unions, the demarcation of Trade Union boundaries as well as all decisions concerning the Trade Union movement in its general aspects.

The National Committee meets at least once every three months by convocation of the Executive. It also appoints the auditors.

The Auditing Commission is composed of three members, two of whom have to resign every year, and may not be re-elected. They make their audits every six months.

#### D) THE CONGRESS.

Next to the Executive and the National Committee comes the annual Trade Union Congress, which is the highest authority of the Belgian Trade Union movement.

The chief duties of the Congress are :

- (a) The discussion of the reports of the secretariats submitted in the name of the Executive.
- (b) The discussion of the items on the agenda.
- (c) The discussion of modifications proposed in the rules.
- (d) The examination for ratification or rejection of the decisions of the National Committee relative to the affiliation or exclusion of unions, these decisions being those against which appeal has been made by the interested parties.
- (e) Nomination of the members of the Executive.

Votes in the Congress are taken per head ; if however, one tenth of the delegates present demand it, a record or card vote is taken, as may be required.

The appointment of members of the executive takes place by secret ballot, that is, if the number of candidates nominated is greater than the number of seats to be filled.

For the ballot or record vote the number of votes is distributed as follows :—

1 vote for 500 members or fraction thereof, for the first 10,000 members.

1 additional vote for 1000 members or fraction thereof, for the next 10,000 members.

1 additional vote for 2000 members or fraction thereof, for the next 10,000 members.

An extra vote for 5000 members or fraction thereof, for figures greater than 30,000.

The votes are allotted to the national organisations, which are themselves responsible for their proper allocation among the delegates.

In regard to the representation to Trade Union congresses, each national centre has the right to be represented as follows:

- 1 delegate for 500 members for the first 10,000.
- 1 delegate for 1000 members for the next 15,000.
- 1 delegate for 5000 members for the next 25,000.
- 1 delegate for 10,000 members for the next 50,000.
- 1 delegate for 20,000 members for figures beyond 100,000.

In cases where they have no mandate from their organisation, the members of the Executive, as well as those of the National Committee, have a consultative vote in the Congress.

The Executive invites the organisations 4 months before the date of the congress to put forward any proposals they may have. These should be addressed to the Secretariat three months at least before the Congress, accompanied by an explanation of their reasons. After that the National Committee decides on the agenda, which it then forwards to the groups, together with the reports, 6 weeks at least before the Congress meets. Only the resolutions listed on the agenda may be debated at the congress—and of course the amendments in connection with these.

In addition to the annual Trade Union congress, this National Committee may also convoke extraordinary congresses, as well as general assemblies of the committees of the organisations.

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Up to 1912 the Trade Union congresses were always held on Christmas day and Boxing Day. This was inconvenient, however, inasmuch as the Reports on Activities for the past year were generally left incomplete, and were sent to the groups too late. To eliminate these difficulties it was decided in 1912 to hold the congress henceforth in the middle of the year, and since 1920 three days have been devoted to its sessions. During the war no congress was held at all.

It goes without saying that it is the reports on activities and finance, and particularly on activities, which have always constituted the most important items on the agenda of the Trade Union Congress. We give below a list of the most important questions which have been debated by the Congress since 1899.

Workers' pensions : The Reduction of the Hours of Work, 8-hour day ; Sanatoria for Workers—; Piece-work ; The Regulation of Apprenticeship ; Trade and Technical Education ; Weekly Rest ; Compulsory Education ; Work in Prisons ; Work in Reformatories ; Industrial Accidents ; Workmen's Compensation ; Article 310 of the Belgian Constitution ; The Minimum Wage ; Committees of Masters and men ; Workers' Control ; The Use of white lead ; The "Trade Union Label" ; Unemployment funds ; Outdoor Works ; The English Week ; Night Work in Glass Factories ; Night Work in Bakeries ; Legal Protection of Women and Children ; Workers' Housing ; Labour Exchanges ; Legal Compulsion for the Posting up of Prices, Wages and Regulations in factories and workshops ; Conciliation Committees and Arbitration Tribunals ; Socialisation and Nationalisation of Industries ; Workers' Control ; Workers' Holidays ; Workers' Discipline ; The Income Tax Laws.

### (9) THE FORCES OF THE TRADE UNION COMMISSION.

We have already observed that up to January 1905 the Trade Union Commission was not exclusively composed of Trade Unions. This was due to the fact that in its early beginnings it was only a Research Committee, and it consequently admitted all who wished to join. The Trade Union members were however in the majority. Thus, of the 13,727 affiliated in 1898, there were 13,341 who belonged to Trade Unions, while only 386 came from Friendly Societies.

We give below a complete table showing the membership from 1898 to 1924.

Year	Mem- bership	Increase		Decrease	
		Number	Per- centage	Number	Per- centage
1898	13,727	—	—	—	—
1899	13,834	107	0,77	—	—
1900	31,311	17,477	126,33	—	—
1901	21,125	—	—	10,186	32,53
1902	8,826	—	—	12,299	58,22
1903	14,378	5,552	62,90	—	—
1904	20,000	5,622	39,10	—	—
1905	34,184	14,184	70,92	—	—
1906	42,491	8,307	24,32	—	—
1907	55,840	13,349	31,41	—	—
1908	67,412	11,572	20,72	—	—
1909	73,366	5,949	8,82	—	—
1910	68,984	—	—	4,377	5,96
1911	77,224	8,240	11,94	—	—
1912	116,082	38,858	50,31	—	—
1913	126,745	10,663	9,18	—	—
1914	129,177	2,432	1,92	—	—
1919	629,736	500,559	387,49	—	—
1920	718,410	88,674	13,44	—	—
1921	698,384	—	—	20,026	2,78
1922	618,871	—	—	79,513	11,38
1923	594,998	—	—	23,873	3,85
1924	577,885	—	—	17,113	2,87

The following table gives a good idea of the progress made in centralisation. We take 1911 as a starting point, 1911 being a good year on which to base these figures, as it was in that year that the Trade Unions set themselves squarely to work for centralisation.

1911	77,224	members of whom	11,57%	were centralised
1914	129,177	" " "	64,88%	" "
1919	629,736	" " "	95,68%	" "
1920	718,410	" " "	96,07%	" "
1921	698,384	" " "	98,72%	" "
1922	618,871	" " "	98,75%	" "
1923	594,998	" " "	97,21%	" "
1924	577,885	" " "	97,29%	" "

In the following table we give the membership of the affiliated organisations on December 31st 1924.

Name of organisation	No. of members on 31st December 1924		
	No. of men	No. of women	Total
<i>Food and drink</i>			
Food and drink trades . . . . .	7,139	1,559	8,698
Hotel employees . . . . .	1,161	59	1,220
<i>Building</i>			
Building workers, furniture makers and various allied industries	—	—	85,842
<i>Intellectual</i>			
General Union of Employees . . . . .	6,975	525	7,500
Teachers' Centre . . . . .	1,875	917	2,792
Socialist Journalists' Union . . . . .	70	1	71
<i>Printing and allied Trades</i>			
Printers . . . . .	6,407	114	6,521
Bookbinders, etc. . . . .	2,897	1,827	4,724
<i>Metallurgy</i>			
Metal-workers Centre . . . . .	111,403	4,304	115,707
<i>Miners</i>			
Miners' Centre . . . . .	74,152	802	74,954
<i>Municipal workers</i>			
Municipal Workers' Centre . . . . .	2,000	—	2,000
Employees of Public Works . . . . .	9,834	811	10,645
<i>Civil service officials</i>			
Post Office, Telegraph, etc. . . . .	72,862	450	73,312
Workers in the Employ of the Ministry of War . . . . .	964	51	1015
National Finance Department Employees Union . . . . .	3,573	—	3,573



Name of organisation	No. of members on 31st December 1924		
	No. of men	No. of women	Total
<i>Stone workers</i>			
Stone-workers' Centre . . . . .	24,707	180	24,887
Paviors . . . . .	930	10	940
<i>Stones and precious metals</i>			
Central Union of Diamond Workers	11,144	655	11,799
National Federation of Jewellers	—	—	750
<i>Tobacco</i>			
Centre of Tobacco-workers . .	3,027	4,018	7,045
<i>Transport</i>			
Transport centre . . . . .	24,114	400	24,514
Tramway Officials' Centre . . .	14,119	66	14,185
<i>Glass</i>			
Central Union of Glass-workers	3,747	1,017	4,764
Glass shop workers' Trade Union	1,460	—	1,460
<i>Clothing</i>			
Textile Centre . . . . .	39,342	29,796	69,138
Clothing Centre . . . . .	1,979	1,450	3,429
Leather-workers' Centre . . . .	6,900	2,100	9,000
<i>Miscellaneous</i>			
Theatre-workers' National Federation . . . . .	6,900	500	7,400
Total			577,885

### (10) THE NEW COURSE OF THE TRADE UNION COMMISSION.

In following the preceding pages the reader has perhaps asked himself what is the secret of the numerous victories and reforms which have been gained by the organised workers. We can answer this question in a few words.

The first cause is self-evident ; namely, the tremendous expansion of the Trade Unions, shewn not only in the enormous increase in their membership, but also by the successes which they have achieved to the advantage of their members.

It is necessary to point out at this juncture that the general tactics adopted by the Trade Union Commission itself, and, under its direction, by the affiliated groups, have been considerably modified. The Commission, we may further add, has re-organised itself into a committee of management. During the last few years it has kept directly in touch with the working class by means of manifestoes and posters. It was the Commission which began to publish all over the country the illustrated posters which met with such unprecedented success among the workers. Moreover, at the initiative of the Commission, district demonstrations were organised, which were very much appreciated by the workers. Thus, in June 1920 the workers turned out in tens of thousands in 25 different districts to demonstrate in favour of a law on rents, for the repeal of article 310 and for the legal enforcement of the 8 hour day. The Commission organised in the months of September, October and November, 1922, a powerful campaign against the reaction; regional Trade Union congresses were also held, factory meetings, etc., which culminated on Sunday November 26th in mass demonstrations in 26 centres, followed by meetings addressed by delegates of the Trade Union Commission. In 1923, on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the Commission, a national demonstration was organised, which constituted at the same time a warning to the reaction. It was carefully planned. On July 29th more than 170,000 workers of both sexes engaged in public services (state, provincial and municipal) as well as private industry, marched for more than 3 hours in two processions round the streets of Brussels, going in the first place to greet the central organisation of the Trade Union movement and at the same time showing the reactionary party that it could not with impunity touch the reforms which had been gained. More-

over, whenever circumstances have demanded, the Commission has regularly submitted protests to the Government, with good results.

Moreover the Commission has taken a keen interest in the education of the leaders of the Unions. Its official organ, "The Belgian Trade Union Movement", which appears once a fortnight, has been during the last few years under the direction of a permanent editor, and has become a valuable source of information. Moreover, it issues annual reports, and since 1920 has published the debates of the Trade Union Congresses, and also accounts of the proceedings of the "Trade Union Weeks". These latter were meetings devoted to the study of some particular question. One such was held at Morlanwelz in 1921, where the question of workers' control was discussed, and another at Ghent in 1924, which studied the question of social insurance. A very successful enterprise has been the publication of pamphlets issued by the Trade Union Commission, which have appeared at irregular intervals, and each number of which is devoted to the study of some topical problem.

The Commission has extended its activities in a most remarkable manner. Before the war all its efforts had to be concentrated on obtaining slight improvements in conditions, and in agitating for trivial reductions in working hours. But now it is in a position to consider problems of far-reaching consequences, in the knowledge that the realisation of its schemes is within the range at any rate of possibility. So it has discussed socialisation, nationalisation, workers' control and the workers' right to examine the books of the concerns. The Commission has also appointed an economic committee composed of delegates from the affiliated organisations and technical experts.

### (11) THE TRADE COUNCILS.

In accordance with the decision taken by the Trade Union Congress in 1914, district Trade Councils have now been set

up in various parts of the country, which have joined up very harmoniously with those already in existence. Such federations at present exist at Aalst, Antwerp, the Borinage district, Brussels, Charleroi, Dinant-Phillipeville, Tournai, Ghent, Liège, Louvaine, Malines, Namur, Nivelles, Ostend, Renaix, Salzaete, St. Nicholas, Turnhout, Verviers and South and West Flanders.

These Trade Union Federations group the local or district sections of the organisations affiliated to the Commission. Their business is to conduct propaganda work as arranged by the Commission and by the National Centres. Many of them organise district congresses on their own initiative and all sorts of conferences and meetings for the leading members. The more important of these federations possess a labour law office, where the affiliated members can obtain information on the subject of the application of labour laws, and which provides them with free legal advice and medical assistance, when needed to help them to get their legal rights. Certain of them also publish regularly bulletins for the use of the Trade Union leaders and there is even one which publishes a weekly organ, of which tens of thousands of copies are printed.

## (12) FINANCIAL RESOURCES

### A) OF THE TRADE UNION COMMISSION.

We have already mentioned that in the first years of its existence the Commission received a subsidy from the Belgian Labour Party, which amounted to 300 francs per year. From 1905, however, the Commission has managed exclusively on the affiliation fees of the affiliated organisations. During the war the sister-organisations abroad, the Netherlands Federation of Trade Unions and the British Trades Union Congress of Great Britain collected help for the maintenance of the Belgian Trade Union movement. The greater part went to the affiliated groups, the rest being kept by the Commission to enable it to carry on its activities. The affiliation fees were

again paid regularly from 1919 onwards. For two years three institutions, the "Social Providence", the "Department of Deposits and Loans", and the "Belgian Labour Bank" have annually deducted from their profits a subscription for the big organisations, among which was the Commission.

The affiliation fees paid to the Commission by the affiliated organisations have varied in the course of years as follows:

1898—1901	2 centimes per member per year
1902—1906	5 centimes per member per year
1907—1910	10 centimes per member per year
1911—1914	16 centimes per member per year
1919—1920	40 centimes per member per year
1921—1923	60 centimes per member per year
1924	70 centimes per member per year

As a result of the increase in the subscriptions in 1907 it became possible to appoint a permanent secretary; and in 1911, after an additional increase, a second secretary was appointed. In 1921 the staff was further increased by two assistant-secretaries. The staff of the Bureau was also increased, and now consists of the following: a secretary-general, two assistant-secretaries, an editor for the "Belgian Trade Union Movement", one translator, an office-manager, two assistants, two typists and an office girl.

Since 1921 ten centimes per member per year has been deducted from the quota of the Commission for the funds of the Labour College. The Workers' Educational Centre receives a grant of 25,000 francs per year. Two or three scholarships are also granted annually to the students of the Labour College.

A group called the "Friends of Workers' Education" has been formed since 1924, which receives 20 centimes per member per year from all the big organisations; it is the business of this body to provide assistance for all activities connected with Workers' Education. The Commission, instead of giving various subscriptions and scholarships, now makes a regular subscription of 20 centimes per member per year.

## B) OF THE AFFILIATED ORGANISATIONS.

The organisations affiliated to the Trade Union Commission have done very good work in raising the level of contributions, thereby ensuring the payment of decent benefits. This action has both strengthened the Unions' funds and has augmented their powers of resistance. Below is given a table showing the returns, expenditure and cash in hand for the last 10 years.

Year	Returns	Expenditure	Cash in hand on 31 December
1910	2,096,566.00	1,832,187.00	3,120,732.00
1911	1,862,598.00	1,730,416.00	1,877,200.00
1912	4,709,878.00	3,674,107.00	4,379,867.00
1913	3,913,241.63	4,188,715.64	4,045,372.40
1919	14,597,704.53	6,232,311.90	9,730,504.58
1920	36,424,419.23	25,885,488.57	19,267,533.67
1921	83,253,528.48	74,937,507.45	35,105,761.94
1922	73,020,223.84	59,009,395.59	49,381,935.31
1923	64,323,826.56	52,106,858.59	55,352,821.83
1924	75,042,145.35	57,410,988.54	66,959,386.04

## (13) THE TRADE UNION PRESS.

With the single exception of the Journalists' Union, all the organisations affiliated to the Commission publish a trade journal. Four of these publications are bi-lingual; some are in French or Flemish only, but most of them have both a French edition and a Flemish edition. Two of them are weekly, 9 appear twice monthly and the rest once a month. During the year 1924, for example, 13,249,420 copies of the various Trade union organs were printed.

Besides the organs of the national organisations, there are also those which are published by local or district branches.

## (14) INTER-RELATIONS.

### A) NATIONAL RELATIONS.

Although no longer actually incorporated in the Belgian Labour Party, the Trade Union Commission still keeps up with it the friendliest and most cordial relations. Two delegates of the General Council of the Belgian Labour Party sit on the Bureau of the Trade Union Commission and 3 delegates of the latter have a place on the Bureau of the General Council. For all important questions of interest to both organisations joint meetings are held between the two executives as well as between the General Council and the National Committee. Through the Belgian Labour Party the Trade Union Commission is able to maintain contact with the parliamentary Socialist group in the Chamber and Senate for the purpose of doing what they can in the realm of social legislation.

The same cordial connections are maintained with the Co-operative Centre. A mixed commission has been constituted between the two organisations, which is composed of 10 members, 5 of each party, whose business it is to eliminate or solve by conciliation or arbitration any difficulties or differences which may arise between Trade Unions and Co-operatives.

Moreover the Trade Union Commission is represented in the Workers' Educational Centre, the Labour College, the Central Youth Committee, and the National Committee for Women, as well as in the "Department for Loans and Deposits"—the banking institution set up by labour organisations—and the "Eglantine" Publishing House.

### B) INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS.

The Trade Union Commission is affiliated with the International Federation of Trade Unions at Amsterdam. Its representative was present at the Conference at Copenhagen in 1901, when the first international links between national centres were created. It also affiliated to the International Secretariat of National Trade Union Centres founded in 1903, which

had its headquarter at Berlin. It was one of the founders of the Amsterdam International Federation of Trade Unions in 1919, and has remained steadily loyal to this organisation since then.

The Commission also supports the work of the International Labour Office. Its delegates are regularly invited by the Belgian Government to take part in the International Labour Conferences ; and, on all the seven different occasions on which international labour conferences have been held, it has nominated a representative to act as official labour delegate, in accordance with Clause 389 of the Treaty of Versailles.

In upholding the International Labour Office and its conference, the Commission encourages international labour legislation, not only as an extension of its own national social legislation, but also as a means of inducing other states to legislate in this direction.

The Commission has also for some years, through the medium of the Belgian section, been a member of the International Association against Unemployment.

All the affiliated organisations of the Commission belong to an International Trade Secretariat, except for the gold- and silver-smiths, who no longer have a special Trade International, and the socialist journalists.

## (15) OTHER ECONOMIC ORGANISATIONS.

### A) ORGANISATIONS OF VARIOUS TENDENCIES.

#### *Economic organisations not belonging to the Commission.*

There are two quite distinct tendencies within the Belgian Trade Union movement. To the first of these two groups belong those Trade Unions which recognise the principle of the class-struggle. The second finds its adherents in the various organisations which believe in the reconciliation of classes. 2

The organisations which recognise the principle of the class-struggle are :

- (1) Groups affiliated to the Belgian Labour Party.



(2) Independent Trade Union organisations.

These two groups form part of the Commission.

(3) Various independent groups, not affiliated, such as the window-glass-workers in the Charleroi district.

(4) The Bolshevist Knights of Labour (organisations created in 1922-23).

The organisations which believe in the reconciliation of classes are :

(1) The Christian (Catholic) Trade Unions.

(2) The "liberal" Trade Unions.

(3) Certain groups of public services.

#### B) THE "CHRISTIAN" TRADE UNIONS.

The Christian Trade Unions were formed to combat the Socialist and independent organisations. Before the constitution of the Belgian Labour Party there were no Christian Trade Unions. They were established here and there towards the end of the '80's and in the early '90's. Their chief feature was and still is the small contributions they demand, and the proportionately heavy benefits they pay. They hope in this way to thwart that section of the Trade Union movement which works on the principle of the class-struggle. The first groups were formed mainly at Ghent.

Following a decision taken by the Catholic Union, on the initiative of Father Rutten, a commission made a visit to Germany in 1901 for the study of the Christian Trade Union movement there. At the congress of 1903 held at Hasselt Father Rutten gave a report of this journey, and it was decided to constitute a *General Secretariat of Christian Trade Unions*.

This decision was duly acted upon and the Secretariat formed on April 1st, 1904. In Paragraph 2 of their programme it is stated :

"It (the Secretariat) shall make a careful study of socialist Trade Union propoganda for the purpose of supplying full information to those whose desire it is to combat this movement."

The National Organisations constituted by the Secretariat set up on December 17th 1908 a "General Confederation of "liberal" Trade Unions", divided into two autonomous sections. The Flemish section bore the name of the "General Federation of Christian Trade Associations", the Walloon section "The General Confederation of "liberal" Christian Trade Unions of the Walloon Provinces". The word "liberal" was added to the name in order, according to Father Rutten, to obtain the support of the liberal unions of Walloon-Brabant and Hainault, "who reject the collectivist ideal and offer guarantees sufficient to enable Christian workers to affiliate" (report 1909, page 37). The title was subsequently altered to General Christian Trade Union. The affiliation fee was 10 centimes per member per year, 5 centimes of which was deducted for the Secretariat at Ghent.

After the Armistice the "General Christian Trade Union" underwent certain modifications. It became the organisation for both Flemish and Walloon Belgium, and its headquarters was transferred from Ghent to Brussels. Its rules defined its aims and methods as follows :

*Art. 2.* This federation is carried on in an autonomous manner and is independent of all political parties. It has its headquarters at Brussels, and its aims are :—

- a) to take in hand the general direction of the Christian Trade Union organisation and to preserve its unity.
- b) to work for the expansion and development of the Christian Trade Union organisation, and particularly to encourage existing trade organisations and to help found new ones.
- c) to maintain constant relations with the International Federation of Christian Trade Unions.
- d) to prepare and organise Trade Union meetings, social weeks, and congresses.

*Art. 3.* These aims are to be furthered by

- a) the promotion, encouragement and arrangement of Union assemblies of the same trade or in the same district ;
- b) the drawing up of rules and regulations ;

- c) the indemnification of the initial expenses ;
- d) the publication of an official organ ;
- e) the maintenance of permanent propaganda ;
- f) the institution and administration of a reserve fund ;
- g) intervention with the public authorities in the name of the Christian Trade Union organisation ;
- h) the institution of a Council of Arbitration for the solution of differences and difficulties in the Christian Trade Union organisation.

The General Federation of Christian Unions is governed by an executive committee, composed of delegates from the affiliated groups and an ecclesiastical councillor appointed by the authorities of the church.

As far as membership is concerned, we take the following figures for the pre-war period from the reports published by Father Rutten ; for the period after the war, from the reports of the General Federation of Christian Unions itself. We cannot, however, guarantee the correctness of the figures quoted, as we have no means of checking them. We have indeed every reason to believe, that these figures have been exaggerated ; this is certainly true in the case of two groups whose figures we have been able to investigate.

1905	14,000 (about)	1911	71,235
1906	20,231	1912	82,761
1907	30,231	1913	102,177
1908	39,517	1920	156,631 (1)
1909	40,537	1921	200,102 (1)
1910	49,478	1922	162,036

#### c) OTHER GROUPS.

There are no statistics to be obtained for the other groups. The Bolshevik Knights of Labour, composed chiefly of miners and metal workers, are said to number 6—9000. But there is no means of testing the accuracy of these figures. This organisation has been founded by the dissidents from the Trade

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(1) On March 31st.

Unions and by those who have been expelled from the U affiliated with the Trade Union Commission. Nothing is ever published concerning the "liberal" trade unions, which are few in number and small in membership. They have not the least influence and no notice is taken of them.

There also exist groups of officials in the state, on the subject of which nothing is published, either with regard to their activities or membership. As none of these organisations ever gives any sign of life we can but suppose their activity to be negligible. Their influence may be measured by the profound silence which envelops them.

Two independent organisations, conducted on the principle of the class struggle, but not affiliated to the Trade Union Commission, show proof of considerable activity, and these have exercised a decided influence with the employers. They are the New Glass-Workers' Union of Lodelinsart and the Independent Belgian Trade Union of Employees at Brussels. Neither of these adopts an aggressive attitude towards the Commission. As a matter of fact, the latter has more than once requested to be admitted to membership. Their application has never been accepted, however, because only one organisation for each trade or industry can be admitted to membership of the Commission. Efforts have been made, but without success, to amalgamate this organisation with the Employees' Centre, which already belongs to the Commission.

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## INDEX.

	Page
(1) Introduction . . . . .	3
(2) The forerunners of the Belgian Trade Union movement . . . . .	4
a) The guilds and trade corporations . . . . .	4
b) The trade clubs for mutual assistance . . . . .	5
c) The Societies of Resistance . . . . .	5
d) The Knights of Labour . . . . .	8
(3) Obstacles to be overcome . . . . .	9
(4) The New Epoch . . . . .	11
a) After the Anti-Combination Law . . . . .	11
b) The Trade Union Commission . . . . .	13
(5) The Trade Union Commission during the War . . . . .	17
(6) The Post-War Period . . . . .	18
(7) The Era of achievements . . . . .	20
(8) The Constitution of the Trade Union Commission: . . . . .	22
a) Its aims and activities . . . . .	22
b) The Executive . . . . .	26
c) The National Committee . . . . .	27
d) The Congress . . . . .	27
(9) The forces of the Trade Union Commission . . . . .	30
(10) The new course of the Trade Union Commission . . . . .	33
(11) The Trade Councils . . . . .	35
(12) Financial Resources : . . . . .	36
a) of the Trade Union Commission . . . . .	36
b) of the affiliated organisations . . . . .	38

(13) The Trade Union Press . . . . .	38
(14) Inter-relations . . . . .	39
a) National relations . . . . .	39
b) International relations . . . . .	39
(15) Other Economic Organisations : . . . . .	40
a) Organisations of various tendencies . . . . .	40
b) The "Christian" Trade Unions . . . . .	41
c) Other groups . . . . .	43