

The problems, obviously, are not easy of solution. But one notable step remains to be taken which is wholly in keeping with the standards of a democratic nation. This step would look toward genuine participation by the whole body of unions throughout the nation in the formulation of policies and their administration in the organization of production, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, in supplying the essential needs of the civilian population. This participation would take the form of joint union-management committees in workshops, and of representation of labor in administrative and policy-making governmental agencies in the local community. This twofold participation in industry and in the community should be carried from the

local community through every level of administration to the national government.

It is true that industrial workers, along with all other citizens, must make sacrifices. But only those sacrifices should be expected which definitely contribute to the well-being and effectiveness of the nation at war. A voice in determining these conditions, especially wages, hours, speed of work, and safety, is the only possible assurance that the necessary sacrifices will not be in vain. Moreover, this representation of the workers, with their first-hand experience in the processes of production, will go far to release workers' energy for an even higher level of productivity, while safeguarding their health and welfare.

Joint Production Committees in Great Britain

By J. VERNON RADCLIFFE

THE Joint Production Committees, which have sprung up by the thousand in the engineering factories of Great Britain, are the product of an agreement in March of last year between the employers' federation and the trade unions and are direct descendants of the industrial concord established at the outbreak of the war. They function on the factory level but their parentage is to be found in the national arrangements between the Government, the unions and the employers which established and have maintained a unity of endeavour and of purpose greater even than that of World War I.

Joint Production Committees identify the organized workers with the drive for maximum output. This has required a change of mental outlook. The traditional trade union policy in Great Britain has been to increase the number of workers rather than to increase the output of the

individual worker. To spread work among as many workers as possible has been, for the unions, an accepted means of lessening unemployment.

For the introduction of piece-work and the payment of output bonuses, to secure a large individual output by each worker and thus to lessen the unit costs of production, the employers and not the work people have been responsible. These methods of payment have been established in spite of initial opposition by the unions though the work people would not, during many past years, have been willing to sacrifice the larger earnings which they have ensured.

But the unions have not, except in war time, been concerned with promoting factory output. Their readiness to take another view was prompted by knowledge of the vital need for equipment, weapons and munitions of every kind, and the removal of the fear of unemployment, for themselves or their fellow unionists, during the war.

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Unions Accept "Dilution" of Skilled Labour

War production could never have been raised to the high level of the national needs if the unions had not been prepared from the very outset to suspend for the duration of the war the hard-won industrial customs and workshop practices which make up the great body of what are collectively known as trade union rights and privileges. The employers and the Government gave pledges that these surrendered customs and practices should all be restored, and by and by Parliament gave the pledges statutory validity.

By suspending their rights the unions made possible the "dilution" of skilled labour, the upgrading of semi-skilled and unskilled workers and the introduction to the factories of many thousands of women to do work normally reserved for men. The dilution and upgrading in turn opened the way to the breaking down of industrial processes into a number of relatively simple, repetition jobs and the rapid training of unskilled men and women to proficiency in one or two highly specialised processes. The skilled men were reserved for the highly skilled work of tooling and setting.

These changes were begun before the outbreak of war and went on steadily and with little friction while the Ministry of Labour and National Service was busily allocating manpower between the fighting forces and industry and between one industry and another, taking men and women from the less essential occupations and transferring them with compulsory powers, to the more essential. The grim determination never to yield to the Nazis took a firmer hold of the workers, as of the whole nation, after the collapse of France had left Britain almost naked of defence and there was again an industrial rousing when Germany's attack on Russia brought in the U.S.S.R. as a powerful ally. The latter event put the voluble propaganda of the British Communist Party on the side of the production drive.

Regional Production Board

There sprang up an agitation for associating the workers in the factories with the managements in a more active campaign for maximum output. At the same time there was increasing pressure from industry and the trade unions to develop regional organisation of production with a permanent full-time controller in each area and a Regional Production Board (over which the controller would preside) composed of employers' and trade union representatives and including also the chief regional officers of the Supply Departments, the Ministry of Labour and the Board of Trade. A committee appointed by the first Minister of Production reported emphatically in favour of strengthening the regional administration in this way. The Chairman of the committee was Sir Walter Citrine, the General Secretary of the Trades Union Congress. Its recommendations were accepted almost entirely by the Government. They provided for regional decentralisation and for still further decentralisation within the regions. In this system of control the unions were given equality of place with the employers. It was but a step to the setting up of joint production committees in the factories.

The joint committees have required a change in the attitude of managements as well as of the unions. A considerable proportion of the production committees have found it expedient to give some attention to piece-rates and bonuses all of which, it should be remembered, are settled independently factory by factory. Similarly as to management there is no rigid line which the joint committees may not cross. All matters relating to production, from the supply of raw materials of the right quality and in the right quantity, to the lay-out of the workshop, the supply of machine tools and the designing of jigs and tools, are definitely within the advisory competence of the committees and they are all in the sphere of management.

Managerial authority and responsibility remain intact but managing directors and the shop foremen, who have been accustomed to issue orders without liability to question, have had to adapt themselves to conditions in which criticism or inquiry may arise from the factory floor. The criticism must be made in an orderly way and not to the prejudice of production; but it is a new thing to give criticism by the work people a recognised place in factory affairs. The functions of the joint production committees are, it should be emphasized, wholly advisory. They possess no "powers" and their influence depends on the ability of the members—managerial and worker alike—to use them as means of evoking ideas, sifting them and adopting or adapting them to the common aim of adding to the resources for war. The binding quality of this common aim is the cement of the joint committees.

Experienced in Joint Discussions

Joint Production Committees can only function with full success if they carry industrial relations into a new climate. The engineering, like other British industries, is experienced in joint discussions. For the most part they have been discussions on matters of difference between employers and workers, such as wage rates, or the duration of the working week. The attitude of the parties has been that of men sitting together, it is true, but on opposite sides of a table. In the joint production committees they are really, if not physically, at a round table.

The General Council of the Trades Union Congress has found it advisable on this account to give the worker members of the committees a word of counsel. They have been advised not to refrain from making contributions to production by ulterior thoughts of possible consequences in later developments. "If we do this may they not also ask for that?" is an attitude to be deprecated. The workers must no longer throw back on the management the entire responsibility for factory organisation and the preven-

tion of waste in time, energy and materials.

They are told: "This is not a private war; it is everybody's war and the country has realized that the vast amount of technical skill and experience of the workers must be tapped by production committees." It is the new climate of unreserved co-operation that the joint committees have to create, each for itself.

Vital Spontaneous Movement

How far they have succeeded cannot be a matter of exact knowledge but there are significant pointers. The formation of committees is not a legal but a voluntary obligation. The agreement between the employers' federation and the unions made provision for joint committees in factories with more than 150 work people but not in the smaller concerns. Within twelve months the joint committees were functioning in well over 2,000 large engineering works employing fully 2,000,000 work people and in addition many hundreds of the smaller factories had fallen into line and set up committees for themselves.

This is a fact attesting the vitality and spontaneity of the movement. The joint committee principle is capable of adaptation to works of every size for the dual purpose of evoking constructive ideas from the bench, and of informing the representatives of the work people of the nature of the managerial problems which beset production in war time. The committees are, when effectively used, a two-way channel of communication. They link the submerged workman—the individual among the thousands or the ten thousand of a large concern—with the distant higher management and they allow the voice of authority to be interpreted downwards through workmen whose interests and industrial experience are those of the workshop. Hindrances and delays in production, otherwise inscrutable to the man or woman at the machine, can be made intelligible when the cause is a change, for example, in the type of an aircraft or a major modification in design.

There is no uniform pattern of committees. For efficiency's sake they should be small for they are designed as working units not debating societies. It is not necessary that the management and the work people should be equally represented. There is no question of decisions being taken or lines of action settled by majority vote. What is necessary is that the management should be adequately represented and by the right people who can themselves appraise, or ensure the full appraisal of every suggestion. The committees are a medium for the pooling of ideas. It rests with the management to determine finally what shall be done with an idea but a wise management will not leave the decision to a minor official who may be disposed to feel that a change of practice or of organisation is a reflection on his own competence. Decisions should rest with well qualified members of the higher executive who will not be hesitant in stating and defending them.

Trade Unionist Worker Members

Remembering the experiences of the last war when trade union authority and discipline—elastic, but genuine restraints on impulsive action and agreement-breaking—were set aside by self-constituted committees of shop stewards, which established an organisation of national scope, the trade unions made it a condition that the worker members of production committees should be trade unionists of some standing. The many thousands of worker members of the committees are not trade union officials but ordinary workmen or workwomen. As trade unionists they are part of a scheme of things which has been built up on loyalties, good faith and adherence to rule. They recognise the obligation of agreements which fix the place of trade unionism in British industry and will not be inclined to trespass on the field of wage negotiations or rate fixing for which there is other and well-defined machinery.

A complication may occur when shop-stewards are also elected members of production committees for they are the

workers' representatives in rate-fixing and it may not be easy to be exclusively a shop-steward one hour and exclusively a member of a production committee the next. But on the whole the production committees have kept within the functions laid down in their constitution.

Employers have no doubt of the desirability of the tie-up with the unions. It is a safeguard against "unofficial" movements which are a bugbear to managements. There was indeed an incipient shop-stewards' movement earlier in this war which threatened to develop on the same lines as that of the last war. It has not entirely disappeared but it has been kept under. The more complete the recognition of the unions the less is the danger of an upstart and rival leadership.

Formal Ministerial Recognition

Joint production committees are not an organic part of the Government machinery of production, which descends from the Ministry of Production through the regional boards to district committees and there stops. They have, however, received formal recognition by the Minister of Production who has arranged that matters beyond their capacity may be referred to his district committees. At that point they reach the official machinery and, if the need occurs, may be referred to the regional boards and even to the Ministry's headquarters.

The trade unions have an independent but parallel chain of contact from the factory to the Ministry. They have formed their own district committees, to which each factory is linked, and above the district committees is a trade union advisory committee for the engineering and shipbuilding industries. Here the representatives of the districts meet the five trade union vice-chairmen of the Regional Boards—five out of eleven; the other six being employers—who also have places in the Minister's advisory council along with other trade union and employer members. The trade union chain is unbroken and provides a means for the rapid transmission of information

from the factory to the Ministry should the official contacts fail at any point.

The work of joint production committees does not come into the limelight. It is concerned with the details of production and the importance of details is in their context. Two investigations have been made to discover the sort of subjects which engage attention, one by the Ministry of Aircraft Production, which was limited to aircraft factories, and the other by the Amalgamated Engineering Union which had a much wider range. The Ministry of Aircraft Production found that technical and organisational problems of production predominated over questions of welfare and that as many as 25 per cent of the constructive proposals for improving production passed the first scrutiny and were referred for fuller examination but with results not known when the investigation was made.

Attention to Absenteeism

The union's inquiry embraced 550 establishments having production committees. Its report was frank in its dealing with absenteeism and late-coming to which as many as two-fifths of the committees had given attention. But the committees are reluctant to meddle with matters of discipline. The General Council of the Trades Union Congress has indeed advised them to avoid disciplinary affairs, difficult though that may sometimes be.

An analysis of the topics discussed and the percentage of committees that have discussed each topic is given in the tables that follow. The first relates to production topics.

Absenteeism and late-coming.....	41.0
Lack of machine tools.....	35.0
Improvements of existing machine tools....	24.5
Shift system and general use of production time.....	24.5
Improved use of machine tool capacity....	23.2

Improved use of labour force.....	22.5
Organization of stores and equipment.....	22.5
Output bonuses and piece rates.....	21.5
Inspection methods.....	20.0
Progressing.....	17.2
Up-grading and training of women and new entrants.....	10.4
Avoidance of and salvage of scrap.....	10.0
Lay-out of plant and use of workshop space.....	10.0
Drawings.....	10.0
Inter-departmental co-ordination.....	9.6
Introduction of production targets, etc....	9.2
Propaganda.....	8.8
Suggestion boxes.....	8.8
Contracts, sub-contracts, priorities.....	6.4
Supervision.....	6.4
Tolerance limits, finish, etc.....	2.8

The variety of welfare topics was smaller and the classification, with the percentage of committees considering each topic was:

Canteens.....	57
Sanitation.....	38
Ventilation.....	36
Transport.....	33
Lighting.....	26
Heating.....	22
Tea breaks, smoking on job, etc.....	22
First aid posts and personnel.....	16
Industrial and protective clothing.....	14
Removable blackout.....	12
Accident prevention.....	11
Firewatching amenities.....	11
Women's welfare questions.....	6

The committees are a war-time creation. They provide a method of workshop co-operation in production by management and workers in a period when total demand is limitless and when speed of production is unaccompanied by fear of short-time or of unemployment when a particular job is completed. Will their usefulness end with the war? The discussion of their future has hardly begun but there are those who see in them the embryo of a mechanism of democracy in industry.