

The Changing World

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IN UNION THERE IS STRENGTH

IN THIS CENTURY we have witnessed great concentrations of economic power. Industrialists and financial leaders have joined together in corporations and associations to increase and control the output and prices of their goods and services. These combinations range all the way from corporations like the American Telephone and Telegraph Company, to trade associations like the American Automobile Manufacturers Association, to the giant over-all groups like the National Association of Manufacturers. These combinations of financial, managerial, and marketing strength have been able to wield tremendous power through influencing consumers, legislatures, and even courts.

The American farmer traditionally has symbolized the rugged individualist. For years he found it hard to accept the principle of union for obtaining a fairer share of the nation's income. But more recently events have convinced large numbers of farmers that as long as agriculture remains unorganized their chances of improving their status and income are small.

Since the early '30's, the farming organizations have become powerful. Note the success with which they have influenced State and Federal legislatures to provide subsidies for the conservation and improvement of the land, experimental agriculture, improved marketing

conditions, deferment of critical farm labor, etc. Three organizations, the Grange, the Farm Bureau, and the Farmers' Union, have adopted and modified the principles and techniques so successfully demonstrated by industry, to the end that agricultural income in the last ten years has placed the American farmer in a very strategic and even enviable position among American economic groups.

Concentration of economic power has come to labor. The history of the labor movement shows relative slow advance up to the depression of the '30's. Then new leadership emerged and the two great mass unions, the A.F. of L. and the C.I.O., became powerful enough to gain their demands rather consistently. The rapid rise in the standard of living in American labor in relation to labor generally throughout the world has been due partially to the power economics wielded by organized labor.

It is true that serious abuses have sometimes been associated with this power. The ends that are sought by organized groups are sometimes so narrowly conceived that their attainment leaves the total economy out of balance and the groups wielding the power in the end suffer as much as they gain. But the net result of these unions of industry, of agriculture, and of labor has been a substantial gain for our econ-

omy. Our standard of living has risen because of the increased efficiency that comes from large-scale industrial organization and management. We have more food and fibre today because strong farmer organization has been able to command sufficient return on the enterprise to make it possible to farm along modern scientific lines. Labor today is able to produce far more per man hour than formerly partly because powerful labor unions have been able to acquire sufficient income so that workers could feed, house, clothe themselves and families, and surround themselves with the essentials of life.

Further, as these various associations and unions have struggled with the common problem of a higher standard of living, they have gained much greater insight into the total economy. Today the industrialist is deeply concerned with the continuous improvement of labor conditions and with increasing the standard of living of his employees. Management in general had to learn this lesson from aggressive labor unions who were powerful enough to force management to pay attention to such matters as working conditions and wages. Likewise, labor unions have learned to contribute to the increasing efficiency of the production line in order that there will be less waste and higher returns. And the more enlightened farm leaders are aware that farmers prosper not at the expense of labor and management, but as each group contributes its power to the cooperative job of running our economy.

With these demonstrations of power economics before them, educators should examine their own success along these lines. It is common knowledge that

education receives far too little of the national income to permit schools to do the job as effectively as the public demands. The salaries of teachers today appear near the bottom of a rank order of incomes. With a tremendous increase in national income, the educator's salary remained static while labor, agriculture, and management have gone steadily forward. Well-organized groups, one after another, have successfully put through their programs while the educational profession has failed repeatedly in attaining favorable action on educational measures.

Many observers attribute the failure of educators to their inability to organize a powerful association. There are over 1,000,000 educators and yet the largest association—the National Education Association—has only 200,000 members. Without the backing of a clear majority of the professional workers, no leadership can make much of an impression on the total body politic.

If this country wants better schools, and if the profession is interested in bettering its effectiveness, then one proven way to attain such ends will be found in united effort. An immediate objective should be 100 per cent enrollment in the N.E.A. A second goal should be an educational campaign to arouse teacher members to join in aggressive support of the leadership when and where action is needed. A third task would be a public relations program to help citizens see what is involved in sound democratic education.

Other groups in our culture have learned the truth of the old adage "in union there is strength." It is time that the teaching profession grasp the full meaning of this simple truth.

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