

## TRADE UNION ORGANISATION IN IRELAND.

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“One half of the world does not know how the other half lives,” according to an old saying. We must presume, therefore, that there are a number of people who do not know much about the Statistical and Social Inquiry Society of Ireland. On the other hand, it would seem that the Society confesses to a certain ignorance concerning Trade Unions in Ireland, though they number in their membership some hundreds of thousands of our fellow-countrymen. This paper has been prepared as a contribution towards the dissipation of that ignorance. But it is by no means an easy task to present a clear picture of the present state of Trade Unionism in Ireland, even though the matter is restricted, as it will be in this paper, to the forms of organisation, without reference to questions of policy. Trade Unions have a long history; they have been moulded by the pressure of economic circumstance as well as by the ideas of their leaders and members; they have had to meet and cope with conditions that vary from year to year and from trade to trade; and in this country they have been affected not only by local conditions but also by conditions in Great Britain. Empiric value rather than theoretic logic is necessarily their governing principle. Consequently it is extremely difficult to analyse them in any strictly logical form. They refuse to be confined within logical categories. Moreover, it is impossible to secure, from any source, statistics of membership that are even remotely satisfactory, and the figures that are given in this paper must be regarded generally as the roughest

of indications. No one system of classification can be followed and no complete statistical enumeration in any classification can be given.

The legal definition of a Trade Union includes, of course, bodies of various types, such as employers' associations and farmers' unions, inasmuch as they have among their objects the regulation of relations between employers among themselves and between employers and employed; but the Trade Unions we are concerned with are those composed of employees, that is, Unions in the ordinary sense. Broadly outlined, Trade Union history in these islands begins with associations of skilled craftsmen in a small area. These develop by amalgamation into national unions of workmen of a single craft or a number of very closely allied crafts, with a later tendency to extend the scope of membership from the craft to the industry. Trade Unions among workers who are not skilled craftsmen is of later growth, and here the tendency to amalgamation into large and somewhat heterogeneous bodies on a national scale is very marked. The organisation of the "black-coated" workers, shop assistants, clerks, civil servants and similar grades, comes later still. In Ireland the course of development has been much the same as in Great Britain. Local societies of skilled crafts are to be found quite as early as in Great Britain, but, for a variety of reasons, which it is not now our purpose to examine, the line of later development crosses with the line of development in Great Britain, so that at the present time a good third of the Trade Unionists of Ireland are members of Unions with headquarters and the bulk of their membership in Great Britain. This gives our first main classification. Examination of the list of Unions affiliated to the Irish Labour Party and Trade Union Congress (which includes most of the larger Unions) gives the following results:—

UNIONS WITH HEADQUARTERS IN IRELAND.			Approximate Membership on 31/12/24.
Irish Transport and General Workers' Union	...	...	61,000
Irish National Teachers' Organisation	...	...	} 12,900
Association of Secondary Teachers of Ireland	...	...	
Irish Agricultural and Technical Instruction Officers' Organisation	...	...	
Irish Union of Distributive Workers and Clerks	...	...	9,555
Irish Post Office Workers' Union	...	...	3,500
Irish Engineering Industrial Union	...	...	3,000
Irish Women Workers' Union (including Irish Nurses' Union)	...	...	3,000

	Approximate Membership on 31/12/24.
Irish Bakers', Confectioners' and Allied Workers' Amalgamated Union ... ..	2,000
Irish Municipal Employees' Trade Union ...	1,550
Irish Mental Hospital Workers' Union ... ..	1,400
Dublin Typographical Provident Society ...	1,050
Ancient Guild of Incorporated Brick and Stone Layers ... ..	600
Belfast and Dublin Locomotive Engine Drivers' and Firemen's Trade Union ... ..	594
Civil Service Clerical Association ... ..	400
Dublin Operative Plasterers' Society ... ..	250
Irish Garment Workers' Industrial Union ...	250
National Union of Sheet Metal Workers and Gas Meter Makers of Ireland ... ..	160
Packing Case Makers' Union ... ..	100
Irish National Painters' Trade Union ... ..	—
Flax Roughers and other Textile Workers' Trade Union ... ..	—

## UNIONS WITH HEADQUARTERS IN GREAT BRITAIN.

National Union of Railwaymen ... ..	11,700
Amalgamated Transport and General Workers' Union ... ..	8,000
Amalgamated Society of Woodworkers ... ..	7,414
Tailors and Garment Workers' Trade Union ...	3,692
Railway Clerks' Association ... ..	2,700
Associated Society of Locomotive Engine Drivers and Firemen ... ..	2,100
National Amalgamated Society of Operative House and Ship Painters and Decorators ... ..	1,970
Typographical Association ... ..	1,620
National Union of Vehicle Builders ... ..	1,385
United Operative Plumbers' and Domestic Engineers' Association of Great Britain and Ireland ...	1,315
Amalgamated Union of Building Trade Workers ...	1,100
National Sailors' and Firemen's Union ... ..	1,000
Union of Post Office Workers ... ..	997
National Amalgamated Furnishing Trades' Asso- ciation ... ..	985
Amalgamated Society of Tailors and Tailoresses ...	700
National Union of Life Assurance Workers ...	262
Amalgamated Engineering Union (some branches only) ... ..	250

A comparison of the Unions in these two lists reveals some points of interest. All the railway workers (excluding the railway shops) are members of cross-Channel Unions. There is a small Union, the Belfast and Dublin Locomotive Engine Drivers' and Firemen's Union, which has its headquarters in this country, but its membership is only about 600, and I understand that practically all its members are also members of the cross-Channel Unions; it is to be regarded rather as a Friendly Society than a Trade Union.

Building workers are divided; the great majority are members of cross-Channel Unions, but there are two small Unions of building craftsmen, the Bricklayers and the Plasterers, which date back to the beginning of Trade Union history (possibly from the time when one of the old Guilds, the Builders' and Plasterers' Guild, ceased to be, about 1812) and still survive as metropolitan craft societies. Small local societies of building craftsmen still survive also in some other cities as in Belfast and Limerick. Among painters there is both a cross-Channel organisation and an Irish National Painters' Union.

Compositors in the printing trade are divided in Ireland in exactly the same way as in England. The old-established metropolitan societies—the London Society of Compositors and the Dublin Typographical Provident Society—maintain their independence, while the Typographical Association holds sway outside the two capitals.

The engineering trades are divided, the Irish Union being a young organisation formed by a break-away from the older cross-Channel bodies, accompanied by a widening of the scope of membership.

Workers in Government and local authority services are naturally organised in Irish Unions, though the Irish Post Office Workers' Union is a recent amalgamation of both Irish and cross-Channel elements, and is confined to the Free State service, the Northern officers being enrolled in the British Union of Postal Workers. There are two large general Unions. Of these the cross-Channel Union—the Amalgamated Transport and General Workers' Union—is largely composed of workers in various branches of the transport industry (dockers in a number of ports, the Dublin tramwaymen, etc.), while the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union, formed in 1909 as a break-away from the cross-Channel Union catering for dockers, is now much more a general workers' union than it is a transport workers' union. (Two other general Unions—the Workers' Union and the National Union of General and Muni-

cial Workers—operate in the North of Ireland, but are not at present affiliated to the Irish Labour Party and Trade Union Congress.)

It is noteworthy that the Irish Unions are generally either very old or very young. There was for a long period a very marked tendency for Irish workers to become members of cross-Channel Unions, either by direct enrolment of unorganised workers or by absorption of small local societies.

The Irish history of the Amalgamated Society of Woodworkers affords a good illustration of this process. This society is an amalgamation of two older organisations—the Friendly Operative Carpenters' and Joiners' General Union, founded in 1827, and the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners, founded in 1860. The latter body commenced operations in Ireland in 1866, opening branches in Dublin, Belfast, Blackrock, Bray, Derry, Ballymena, Lisburn and Portadown, with an aggregate initial membership of 236. Ten years later the society had additional branches established in Clonmel, Cork, Drogheda, Dundalk, Kells, Newry, Sligo and Waterford, but the branches in Blackrock and Bray had disappeared, leaving a total of 14 branches with an aggregate membership of 499. The General Union also commenced operations in Ireland in 1866, a few months later than the Amalgamated Society, establishing branches in Belfast and Downpatrick. Ten years later it had four branches in Belfast, Lurgan and Larne, with an aggregate membership of 257. There is no record of the absorption by either Union at this time of any pre-existing Irish local organisations, but in 1891 the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners absorbed the Regular Carpenters of Dublin, a local organisation which appears to date from 1764. (There was a Samaritan Society of Cabinetmakers in Dublin in 1801, with already more than a generation of history behind it, which seems eventually to have merged in the organisations of the furnishing trades and the woodworkers.) In 1893 the Amalgamated Society absorbed the Ancient Society of Carpenters in Cork, and thus effectively controlled the three largest cities of Belfast, Dublin and Cork. In 1921 the Amalgamated Society and the General Union were merged into the Amalgamated Society of Woodworkers, and to-day this body has 85 branches in Ireland with an aggregate membership of 7,551, and if there are any local organisations of carpenters and joiners still surviving they are quite inconsiderable.

A more varied history is presented by the record of the Typographical Association in Ireland. This organisation was formed, under the name of the Provincial Typographical Asso-

ciation, in Sheffield in 1849, and a Waterford Branch appeared in the first half-yearly report. Two years later the Executive of the Association decided that it was not expedient to admit new branches from Ireland, and Waterford seceded. In 1861 the Association took the initiative in summoning a conference in Dublin, at which a proposal was considered to form an Irish Association which would be headed by the Dublin organisation, the Dublin Typographical Provident Society, formed in 1809. The proposal met with the approval of the majority of the trade but for some reason was not proceeded with. In 1862 an Association for the Relief of Unemployed Printers was set up as a body with separate funds, but managed by the Executive of the Typographical Association. Membership of this Relief Association was open to Irish centres, and local organisations in Belfast, Waterford, Derry, Limerick, Galway, Sligo, Carlow, Castlebar, Cork, Kilkenny, Newry and Wexford were associated with it by 1868. Dublin still remained quite independent, and in 1873 Limerick seceded. In 1877 the Provincial Typographical Association became the Typographical Association and absorbed the Relief Association. Some of the Irish branches of the Relief Association became branches of the Typographical Association. Limerick, which had had a local society from 1819, became a branch of the Association in 1879. Wexford did not join until 1888, and Cork, where a local society was founded in 1806, remained independent until 1900. In 1894 the Association appointed an Irish organiser. At the present time the Association has 19 branches in Ireland, with a membership last June of 1,671.

In recent years there has been a tendency in the opposite direction, but except in the case of the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union, the later tendency has been much weaker. To some extent it has been inspired by national feeling and by an entirely mistaken notion that cross-Channel Unions drained money from Ireland. But against the promptings of national feeling may in many cases be urged the practical economic advantages of membership of a Union that caters for the same class of workers in Great Britain, on the double ground that Irish workers not infrequently migrate across the water and that industrial conditions in this country are in many cases dominated by conditions in the more highly developed country. A greater aggregate membership also offers considerable advantages in administration and benefits; the attraction of size has been shown also in the case of the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union, which has absorbed a number of small local societies.

The motives of cross-Channel Unions in organising Irish workers have not been wholly altruistic. Lack of organisation or imperfect organisation in Ireland meant the existence of a reservoir of "blacklegs" who might migrate to Great Britain and the perpetuation of bad conditions of labour here which would react on conditions in Britain. But Trade Unionists do not weigh profit and loss in any commercial spirit. Organisation is for them a gospel of universal application, and cross-Channel Unions have enrolled members readily in this country, though probably every one of them has spent far more money here than it has received. On the other side of the account, it must be remembered that several of the pioneers and not a few of the present-day leaders of Trade Unions in Great Britain were and are Irishmen.

One example of the withdrawal of a British Union from Ireland is noteworthy. The National Union of Shop Assistants, Warehousemen and Clerks, which had been operating in Ireland since 1899 or earlier, withdrew from this country and handed over its members by agreement to the Irish Union of Distributive Workers and Clerks, when that body in 1920 extended its scope beyond the Drapers' Assistants, for whom it was established in 1901.

Some of these cross-Channel Unions devolve a substantial measure of autonomy upon their Irish membership. The Railway Clerks' Association has an Irish Office, an Irish Secretary (Senator J. T. O'Farrell), and an Irish Council. The National Union of Railwaymen also has an Irish Office and Secretary, and for a short period had an Irish Council. The Amalgamated Transport and General Workers' Union, the National Sailors' and Firemen's Union, the Typographical Association, and the National Amalgamated Furnishing Trades' Association have Irish Offices and Secretaries or Organisers. The Amalgamated Engineering Union has two Organisers—one for the Free State area and one for Northern Ireland. In many cases Ireland is a separate district for the election of a member or members of the Union Executive; the Amalgamated Society of Woodworkers, for example, has a full-time representative of Ireland on its Executive.

It will be convenient here to refer to the curious legal situation that has arisen as a result of the establishment of two Governments in Ireland. Registration under the Trade Union Acts is not compulsory on Trade Unions, but as it gives some not very important but not inconsiderable legal advantages, most Unions are registered. Before 1920 a Union could register its rules with the Registrar of Friendly Societies in London.

in Dublin or in Edinburgh, according to the location of its head office, and was required to record its rules and alterations of them at the Registry in the other two capitals if it carried on business in the respective countries. This recording was a matter of routine, the original registration involving recording automatically. Now both the Free State and Northern Governments and Parliaments have full authority over the registration of Trade Unions. After some hesitation the Free State Registry has decided that it can continue to record the rules of Trade Unions registered elsewhere, but it is doubtful how far this recording carries the full rights of registration. The Free State Revenue Commissioners at least have held that it does not entitle a Trade Union to certain exemptions given by the Income Tax Act, 1918, to registered Trade Unions, holding that "registered" means in the new conditions "registered in the Free State." One unfortunate effect of this has been to put an end to certain Trade Union efforts to provide houses for their members. There is also some obscurity in regard to the Trade Union Act, 1913, which requires the alteration of rules and the taking of a ballot for certain purposes to be under the control of the Registrar. The full implications of this change due to the establishment of two new jurisdictions have not been worked out, but it will be obvious that a pretty puzzle is presented when practically every Union operating in Ireland is under two jurisdictions and very many of them under three.

A further division of Unions may be made between those that work on a national scale and those that are substantially local in character. All the Unions with headquarters outside Ireland work, of course, on a national or rather an international scale. The great bulk of the membership of the Unions with headquarters in Ireland is also in national Unions, not more than a few thousand Trade Unionists being members of local Unions. Among the local Unions are the Dublin Typographical Provident Society, the Dublin Operative Plasterers' Society and the Ancient Guild of Incorporated Brick and Stone Layers, already referred to. The last two have members outside Dublin, but probably not in sufficient number to affect their substantially local character. In the North there are a number of Unions that are local because the industry with which they are concerned is localised. Among these are the Flax and other Textile Workers' Trade Union, Irish Linen Lappers' and Warehouse Workers' Trade Union, Lurgan Hemmers' and Veiners' and General Women Workers' Trade Union, Ulster Weavers' and Winders' Trade Union, and Portadown, Banbridge and District Textile Operative Society, all united in a



Textile Federation, and some half-dozen other linen trade organisations. Other local Unions in the North include a House and Ship Painters' Union (a very old-established body), a House and Ship Plasterers' Union, a Stonecutters' Society, a Glaziers' Society, a Paviers' Society, a Tailors' Union, and a Journeymen Butchers' Association. The membership of each of these is probably limited to a few hundreds at most. Leaving on one side the textile workers' organisations, it would seem that the local organisations in Belfast are of much the same type and have survived in much the same way as the local organisations in Dublin and other Southern centres. A notable exception would be the recently formed Ulster National Teachers' Organisation, which, however, has not ousted the all-Ireland body—the Irish National Teachers' Organisation.

Perhaps the most interesting classification of Unions would be a classification by industry, but this can only be attempted in the sketchiest of fashions, because, apart from the by no means simple problem of deciding what is an industry, many Unions enrol members in several industries, and it is impossible to ascertain their membership in any one industry. What follows is an attempt to indicate broadly the distribution of membership in certain important industrial groups.

The sign † indicates that the Union has members in several groups. A dash indicates that no figures of membership are available.

## TRANSPORT.

	Approximate Membership.
<i>Railways</i> (excluding railway shops)—	
National Union of Railwaymen ... ..	11,700
Railway Clerks' Association ... ..	2,700
Associated Society of Locomotive Engine Drivers and Firemen ... ..	2,100
Belfast and Dublin Locomotive Engine Drivers' and Firemen's Trade Union (probably all members of other Unions) ... ..	600
Irish Transport and General Workers' Union ...	†
<i>Dockers, Carters, Tramway Workers</i> —	
Irish Transport and General Workers' Union ...	†
Amalgamated Transport and General Workers' Union (including a number in other indus- tries) ... ..	8,000
<i>Shipping</i> —	
National Sailors' and Firemen's Union ...	1,000

BUILDING AND WOODWORKING.		Approximate Membership.
Amalgamated Society of Woodworkers ... ..		†
(Total membership of about 7,500, including many shipbuilding workers.)		
National Amalgamated Society of Operative House and Ship Painters and Decorators ... ..		†
(See note above. Total membership, 2,000.)		
Irish National Union of Painters and Decorators ...	1,250	
United Operative Plumbers' and Domestic Engineers' Association of Great Britain and Ireland ...	1,300	
Amalgamated Union of Building Trade Workers of Great Britain and Ireland (Bricklayers and Masons) ... ..	1,100	
Ancient Guild of Incorporated Brick and Stone Layers ... ..	600	
Dublin Operative Plasterers' Society ... ..	250	
Slaters' and Tilers' Society ... ..	100	
Various local craft Unions ... ..	—	
Irish Transport and General Workers' Union ...	†	
National Union of Municipal and General Workers' Union ... ..	†	
National Amalgamated Furnishing Trades' Association ... ..	1,000	
(includes members in a variety of different branches of woodworking.)		
Amalgamated Society of Woodcutting Machinists... (See note above.)		†
ENGINEERING AND METAL WORKING, SHIPBUILDING, COACH AND MOTOR BODY MAKING, &c.		
Irish Engineering Industrial Union ... ..	3,000	
Amalgamated Engineering Union ... ..	—	
Amalgamated Society of Woodworkers ... ..	†	
(See note under "Building.")		
National Union of Vehicle Builders ... ..	1,400	
Associated Blacksmiths' and Iron Workers' Society of Great Britain and Ireland ... ..	—	
Boilermakers' and Iron and Steel Shipbuilders' Society ... ..	—	
National Society of Coppersmiths, Braziers and Metal Workers ... ..	—	
National Union of Sheet Metal Workers and Braziers ... ..	—	
National Union of Sheet Metal Workers and Gas Meter Makers of Ireland ... ..	—	

	Approximate Membership.
National Union of Foundry Workers of Great Britain and Ireland ... ..	—
Irish Transport and General Workers' Union ...	†
Amalgamated Transport and General Workers' Union ... ..	†
Workers' Union ... ..	†
National Union of General and Municipal Workers	†

## PRINTING.

Typographical Association ... ..	1,600
Dublin Typographical Provident Society ...	1,050
National Union of Printing, Bookbinding, Machine Ruling and Paper Workers ... ..	—
National Society of Electrotypers and Stereotypers	—
Bookbinders' and Machine Rulers' Association ...	—
Irish Women Workers' Union ... ..	†
Irish Transport and General Workers' Union ...	†

## CLOTHING.

Tailors' and Garment Workers' Trade Union ...	3,700
Amalgamated Society of Tailors and Tailoresses ...	700
Irish Garment Workers' Industrial Union ...	250
Irish Union of Distributive Workers and Clerks ...	†

## DISTRIBUTIVE TRADES.

Irish Union of Distributive Workers and Clerks ... (Bulk of membership, 9,500.)	†
National Union of Distributive and Allied Workers	—
Irish National Union of Vintners', Grocers' and Allied Trades' Assistants ... ..	—
Irish Transport and General Workers' Union ...	†

## MILLING AND BAKING.

Irish Bakers', Confectioners' and Allied Workers' Amalgamated Union ... ..	2,000
Irish Transport and General Workers' Union ...	†

## PUBLIC SERVICES.

*Teaching—*

Irish National Teachers' Organisation ...	} 13,000
Association of Secondary Teachers of Ireland ...	
Irish Agricultural and Technical Instruction Offi- cers' Organisation ... ..	
Ulster National Teachers' Union ... ..	

	Approximate Membership.
<i>Civil Services—</i>	
Irish Post Office Workers' Union ... ..	3,500
Union of Post Office Workers ... ..	1,000
Civil Service Clerical Association ... ..	400
Post Office Clerks' Association (Northern Ire- land) ... ..	—
Post Office Engineering Union ... ..	—
<i>Local Services—</i>	
Irish Municipal Employees' Trade Union ...	1,550
Irish Mental Hospital Workers' Union ...	1,400
Irish Nurses' Union (Section of Irish Women Workers' Union) ... ..	†
Irish Transport and General Workers' Union ...	†
National Union of General and Municipal Workers	†

In all the large towns and, much less effectively, in some of the smaller towns the local branches of Unions are federated into Trades Councils or Workers' Councils. The latter name is merely a new-fashioned variant of the former and dates from 1917, reflecting the Councils of Workers, Soldiers and Peasants, which the Russian Revolution of that year made famous, and expressing also a growing desire to emphasise a broad solidarity and to minimise distinctions between the craftsman and the labourer, who had in some cases shown a tendency to organise separately. These Councils exist in Dublin (affiliated membership, 50,000), Belfast, Derry, Cork, Limerick, Waterford, Wexford, Drogheda, Mullingar, Sligo, Newry, Navan, Athlone. Short-lived attempts to carry on Councils have also been made in a number of smaller towns such as Cavan, Clones, Ballinasloe, Clonmel, Ennis, and there was at least one attempt to work a Council covering a wide rural area in Offaly. The difficulties in such cases are obvious. The membership of most Unions in the smaller towns is necessarily small, so that a Council tends to resolve itself into a sort of aggregate meeting, while, on the other hand, a single Union—the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union—often has the majority of the workers of the town as members, and this lop-sided distribution of strength leads to awkwardness in working. The representative character of the Councils in Cork and Limerick is seriously diminished by the fact that the branches of the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union in those cities are not affiliated to them.

These local Councils have both industrial and political functions. On the industrial side they act as conciliators and arbitrators in disputes between Unions, and generally work to

secure joint action between them when that is called for. Very often also they act as conciliators and negotiators in disputes between Unions and employers. But the development of Unions from local to national bodies and the corresponding tendency for agreements to be made on a national basis with a national employers' organisation have reduced the opportunities of Councils for industrial work. On the political side, the Councils, representing the workers of the area generally, put up candidates and contest elections to local authorities, and play a considerable part in elections to the national legislature. But Trades' and Workers' Councils are essentially urban bodies, and there are only three purely urban Dail constituencies (Dublin City North and South and Cork City), while the electoral areas for County Councils take in large rural districts, so that the Trades Councils are ill-adapted nowadays for political purposes. The Councils have a long history behind them, but their future is somewhat obscure.

Besides Trades or Workers' Councils, which are general local federations of all the local branches of Unions that care to affiliate to them, there are also occasionally special local federations of branches of Unions engaged in a particular trade or industry. Thus, a Furnishing Trades' Federation has recently been formed in Dublin, and there was for a time a Dublin Federation of Unions concerned in the printing trades. In Belfast there is the Textile Federation, a purely local organisation, and three other federations connected with similar organisations across the Channel—the Printing and Kindred Trades Federation, the National Federation of Building Trades Operatives, and the Shipbuilding and Engineering Federation.

We come now to the national federation—the Irish Labour Party and Trade Union Congress. It was founded as the Irish Trade Union Congress in 1894. At the annual meeting of the Congress in Cork in 1895, 150 delegates, representing about 50,000 members, were present. The name was changed to "The Irish Trade Union Congress and Labour Party" in 1912, the Constitution being revised accordingly in 1914, and in 1918 was again changed to "The Irish Labour Party and Trade Union Congress," the reversal of the component parts of the name indicating the increasing importance attached to political work. The membership of the organisation is composed of—

- (a) Irish Unions.
- (b) Unions with headquarters outside Ireland who affiliate on the basis of their membership in this country.

- (c) Branches of Unions not affiliated as a whole.
- (d) Trades and Workers' Councils.
- (e) Persons who subscribe to the objects of the organisation and affiliate to it for political purposes.

The only important Union in Class (c) is the Amalgamated Engineering Union, which is not yet affiliated as a whole, though some of its branches are. Class (e), individual subscribing members, has only recently begun to be effectively organised; the membership in this class is negligible, and, with very few exceptions, consists of persons who are also included as members of affiliated Unions. The composite nature of the organisation makes it impossible to give any accurate figures of the membership. At the present time it may be taken as something over 160,000. The number is difficult to estimate because many trade unionists whose Unions are not directly affiliated are indirectly affiliated through Trades Councils. As in all countries, it has declined slightly in the last few years of economic and particularly agricultural depression, but the turning point seems already past. Funds are raised by a contribution of 3d. per member per annum by affiliated Unions and by contributions on a scale basis from Councils.

The Labour Party and Trade Union Congress holds an annual meeting every August, which is the occasion for a general interchange of views upon topics of labour interest, for laying down general policy by the adoption of resolutions, and for the election of the National Executive. Delegates to the annual meeting are appointed and their expenses paid by the Unions, Union Branches or Councils they represent, and must be *bona fide* members or permanent officials. The number of delegates from any one body is fixed in accordance with a graduated scale which favours the smaller bodies. Voting is by show of hands, though a "card vote," *i.e.*, a vote on a membership basis, may be demanded on any matter involving financial liability on the affiliated organisations. The Congress has met in most of the larger towns of Ireland, though the difficulty of securing accommodation for from 150 to 250 delegates now limits the choice. The Congress of 1925 was held in Newry, Co. Down.

The National Executive, elected every year by the annual meeting, consists of a chairman, vice-chairman, secretary, treasurer, and thirteen other members. Candidates must be delegates to the annual meeting that elects them. Apart from the officers, the representation of any one Union on the Executive

is restricted so that the largest Union may not have more than four members of the Executive, whatever its voting strength among the delegates. The National Executive is the governing body in the intervals between the annual meetings, but beyond the extension of political organisation and the control of the selection of Labour candidates for Parliamentary elections, it is not invested with any very definite authority. It is the recognised spokesman for organised workers in Ireland, but its power derives from its prestige and moral authority and not from any formal transfer of power from the affiliated organisations, which remain fully self-governing in accordance with their own rules. But its authority is none the less, but perhaps more, effective because it is conditioned by wise use and is not enforceable by any definite sanctions.

Ireland is peculiar in that the national centre of Trade Unionism is both a federation of Trade Unions and a political Labour Party. In Great Britain the Labour Party and the Trade Union Congress are two distinct organisations, and although all the important Unions are affiliated to both, and the greater part of the funds of the Labour Party is derived from the Unions, the political organisation has always included in its membership purely political organisations, such as the Fabian Society and the Independent Labour Party, and in recent years it has attracted a large number of individual adherents and has organised local Labour Parties composed in much the same way as itself in most constituencies. On the Continent the Trade Union Congress and the political Labour or Socialist Party are even more distinct, for the political party is built up on an individual basis without affiliation of Trade Unions, though the two wings work in harmony. The Irish method of combining the two functions in one organisation with a single Executive has its advantages, but the experience which has been gained in the last few years and which could not have been gained previously owing to the political conditions has shown that there are serious disadvantages. Henceforward there is likely to be a tendency towards a more distinct form of organisation on the political side, though a complete separation is not to be expected, at any rate for a considerable time to come.

A word must be said at this point of the situation in Northern Ireland. Here there is a separate political organisation—the Labour Party (Northern Ireland)—which is not connected directly with the Irish Labour Party and Trade Union Congress. This body came into being as the Belfast Labour Representation Committee, later transformed into the Belfast Labour Party, and took over from the Belfast Trades Council

political work in connection with elections to the Belfast Corporation and Board of Guardians. With the establishment of the Northern Parliament its scope was naturally widened to include the contesting of elections to that Parliament. In effect its operations have been practically limited to Belfast, though they will doubtless be extended over the whole six counties. It is quite distinct from the British Labour Party. Though it has no formal connection with the Irish Labour Party, many, probably most, of the Unions and individuals affiliated to it are affiliated, directly or indirectly, to the Irish Labour Party. Leading members of the Northern body are prominent among the delegates at the annual meetings of the national body, and one of the Labour Members of the Belfast House of Commons, Mr. McMullen, is a member of the National Executive of the Irish Labour Party and Trade Union Congress. The relations between the two bodies are, of course, quite friendly, and though in theory the National Executive would be entitled itself to undertake political work in the six counties and to put up candidates for the Northern Parliament, there is clearly a case for some form of local autonomy, and the exact relationship between the National and Northern organisations is being worked out, after the usual fashion of Trade Unions, gradually in the light of experience. But while political conditions have produced a certain degree of diversity in political organisation there is no division on the Trade Union side. All the more important Unions affiliated to the Irish Labour Party and Trade Union Congress have members in both Northern Ireland and what is now the Free State area; some of them, for example, the Amalgamated Society of Woodworkers, have more members in the six counties than in the twenty-six. Not only is there no partition of the Trade Unions but Congress after Congress has declared that there is not going to be. Policy and politics are outside the scope of this paper, but it may perhaps be permissible to conclude with the suggestion that the existence of an All-Ireland Labour Organisation, holding Annual Congresses attended by delegates from all parts of the country without distinction and represented by a National Executive which includes citizens of Belfast and Derry as well as of Dublin and Cork, is the surest existing sign that the present political partition of Ireland is not inevitably final.