

Why Belong to the Union?

By WILLIAM GREEN

IN the first place the union holds out the promise of better life. The man or woman who works for wages in an unorganized trade or calling works for longer hours or lower wages or has to deal with conditions that eat into both wage compensation and satisfaction in the job. An agency that brings hope to such situations, restores human dignity and purpose in living. Again, the day's work becomes worth while.

The union is a very simple principle. It is the application of group action to establish and maintain group interests and to enable the group to function in its fullest capacity. Group association we find in practically every relationship in life. The group unit that each of us first became acquainted with is our family. This unit resting on a common economic foundation makes possible the development of its individual members and renders social services to the community. There is mutual dependence within the family for both physical and intellectual growth and families in turn are dependent upon community cooperation.

As we grew older we found our way to schools—a collective undertaking. We got acquainted with the police who guarded against theft and disorder in the municipality, the daily papers, the church—all collective undertakings.

When we arrived at the development when we were to earn our own livings, we looked for jobs. Then we came in contact with a new kind of highly organized undertaking — collective undertakings whose intricate interwoven interests furnished the community with the means to buy the things that ministered to life. If wages (real wages) were high, the workers could have a larger share of the material good things of life and opportunities to satisfy longings for a fuller life.

We always found the management that employed us organized and that the financial resources of the community were organized. Sometimes the employers of the community were organized, sometimes the industry was organized regionally, nationally or internationally. Sometimes we found our fellow workers organized in a union, and that union represented us in dealing with management. The individual worker can make very little impression upon the employer of thousands or even hundreds, but the representatives of all those thousands or hundreds speaks for that very necessary element in production—the human producing power. This human producing power furnishes the intelligence for which machinery is never a substitute—hence it is essential. Upon this fact rests its bargaining strength. With this power coordinated through a union, it increases in geometric ratio, and the terms of employment gained through collective bargaining demonstrate the wisdom of the union as a business investment and a practical agency.

The second service of the union which I wish to submit is the protection it affords against irregular employment and various emergencies. Unemployment is the spectre that besets many a wage earner responsible for obligations and the welfare of others. The union protects its members against unfair discrimination and discharge at the caprice of foremen. Some unions furnish out-of-work or unemployment benefits or insurance. Other unions have helped to regularize production and hence stabilize employment. The union has been a factor in convincing managements that it pays to have a retained, stable force of workers.

Against such mischance as may come through sickness and death, many unions provide sickness, old age and funeral benefits. There is under way now the transition from benefit to insurance principles. As union benefits become increasingly costly, unions began to investigate insurance methods and found that their benefits could be organized upon actuarial principles. Experience makes it possible to estimate losses and to provide the necessary reserves, so unions are developing insurance to take care of union benefits. As the union can practice greater economies than the insurance companies and has an organization that can serve insurance collections, the union is able to render exceptional insurance service to its members. The possibilities of this field are only vaguely realized as yet.

The third union service to which I ask you to give attention is opportunities for adult education and continuous personal growth. Every union has a trade journal or literature that presents the news of the trade and helps the members to keep in touch with industrial and social development. The union constitutes the agency through which the American Federation of Labor seeks to provide information and educational opportunity. The union itself can set up its own educational enterprises. By affiliating with the Workers Education Bureau it can have the benefit of specially prepared texts, literature and advisory service. By its collective book purchasing service, the Bureau makes it possible for all its members to purchase practically all books at a considerable discount.

In the fourth place, through the union wage earners can exert collective political influence that gains consideration. Unorganized wage earners as voters are generally the pawns of designing politicians and have little or no influence in political developments. But if organized in a union and following a program determined by the union, you can force politicians to consider your needs and interests and instead of being the pawns of political machines, you can reverse the situation and can bring about a situation in which human welfare is the dominating consideration. Organization, dis-

cipline, education, are necessary for intelligent political action through the union.

In the fifth place, through a union wage earners can take effective part in the social problems of community life. If organized in a union you can help provide better schools and better playgrounds for your children; better opportunities for recreation for yourselves, better parks, better community centers, better home environments. Your union may maintain rooms for union headquarters and also use these rooms for club purposes so that it may afford members opportunities to enjoy musical, social, literary and educational pleasures as well as meet the business needs of the union.

The enumeration of these possible services indicates the manifold services the union may render. Its possibilities are limited only by the energy, persistence and vision of its members.

The union is a good business investment as proven by higher wages and better working conditions it secures; the benefits it provides; the social, educational and political opportunities it affords.

In addition the union is necessary for the balanced development of industrial progress and organiza-

tion. The union is the agency which is the repository for the accumulated work experience of those engaged in the actual processes of production. It possesses records, traditions, and practices essential to the industry. It is the agency that constantly presents to management the necessity for thinking about the human beings employed in production. A psychologist has said: "The scientific control of conduct may become of greater economic importance than the uses of electricity or steel." We are nearing appreciation of the truth of this statement.

Can you, a wage earner, afford not to belong to a union? Though you may not realize the need of this protection now, can you afford to be without the potential protection of a self-dependent organization mindful of the best interests of wage earners in their relation to production and competent to maintain and advance those interests? Can industry itself afford to be without unions competent to take care of this essential group in emergencies and in technical changes inseparable from progress?

The unions can be maintained only through dependable membership. The union needs you and you need the union. Join the union of your trade and perform a constructive part within your group.