



Trade Union Membership Problems of Transferred War Workers in Great Britain

The movement of workers from one job to another in Great Britain has raised a variety of complicated internal problems for the trade union movement as a whole and for each individual trade union. One of these problems is that of the recognition by one trade union of the membership cards of another. The special arrangements which have been and are now being worked out to safeguard the trade union membership rights of transferred workers are essential to facilitate the movement of workers from one job to another in accordance with changing war labour requirements. Although the British trade union movement is united through the Trades Union Congress, each trade union retains autonomy in dealing with its own affairs. The wartime problems of membership raised by the large-scale transfer of workers from non-essential to essential work overlap the sphere of action of each individual union, and have, therefore, been given considerable attention both by the General Council of the Congress and by the executives of the many unions concerned. Trade unions in the industries subject to a concentration of production, such as the textile industry, have been faced with a tremendous loss of membership. On the other hand, trade unions in war industries, such as the engineering industries, have been faced with a tremendous influx of new members, which has brought up unpleasant memories of the state of the industry after the last war. An individual trade unionist who goes from one job to another has been faced, in the absence of special arrangements, with a double entrance fee and dues, as well as with the loss of the privileges which he had acquired through membership in his former union.

In order to avoid confusion in the trade union movement and inconvenience and financial loss to transferred workers, many unions have come to agreement among themselves in regard to the mutual recognition of trade union membership cards. The General Council of the Trades Union Congress has made recommendations on the subject; but the conditions on which any one union will accept members has traditionally been a question for that union to decide and not for the General Council, which has no jurisdiction whatever in the matter. As yet, therefore, there has not been any general recognition of trade union cards and the question is handled through inter-union wartime agreements.

PROPOSALS OF THE GENERAL COUNCIL

The General Council of the Trades Union Congress issued a statement in the summer of 1940 in which it presented the alternatives for handling the recognition of trade union cards, namely:

(a) To allow matters to proceed in an unregulated way, except in so far as certain unions might have joint working agreements;

(b) For the General Council to ask unions to observe a uniform principle of joint recognition of the cards of trade unionists coming into shops under their control; or

(c) If necessary, to qualify this arrangement (under (b)) by some per capita fee payable to a union willing to recognise the membership cards of another union.

The General Council considered that to leave the question to solve itself would result in endless confusion and jurisdictional conflicts. It pointed out that application of the uniform principle of general recognition of trade union cards meant that it was necessary to think of trade unionism as a whole, rather than for individual unions to absorb large numbers of members from other unions for whom they would continue to bear responsibility when the war comes to an end. A mutual recognition of union cards would, in the opinion of the Council, stabilise the trade unions in non-war industries and enable members to transfer back to their own industries more easily after the war and to regain the rights of full members in their former unions.

After consideration, the General Council decided to urge the executives of the various unions to accept the principle of general recognition of union cards. This would mean that each "recognising" union would instruct its officers that, when a trade unionist entered a factory or shop in which that union was established, that member's existing union card would be fully recognised, on the understanding that the member would work under and abide by the agreements and terms negotiated by the "recognising" union with the employer. The "original" union to which the worker belonged, however, would maintain all the services and benefits to which the transferred member was entitled, although it would not be concerned with trade negotiations and would agree that a transferred member should work under the discipline of the "recognising" union. Moreover, when the trade unionist left his war work, he would be entitled to full facilities for employment, if available, in his old industry. He would continue to pay his contributions either to his own branch (as previously), or to the nearest branch in the district to which he was transferred, or by post.

Wherever possible, the General Council stated that it would like to see agreement for full recognition of the man's original card in this way. If modifications were found to be absolutely necessary, however, the Council proposed certain special arrangements within the general scheme. Thus, there might be a weekly trade contribution to the "recognising" union for trade negotiations and matters of legal aid arising out of employment, including workmen's compensation claims. If this arrangement were adopted, the Council would supply to the "recognising" unions a special emergency contribution card for recording the suggested contribution. Alterna-

tively, arrangements might be made between the unions concerned and the Council as to methods of securing a uniform contribution. The General Council recognised, in addition, that special modifications might have to be made for women workers, whose trade union contributions were often lower than those of men.

The Council submitted this scheme to the unions for their views and expressed the hope that they would be willing to let the scheme operate for a limited period, subject to extension, thus demonstrating "their readiness in a moment of grave national danger to co-ordinate and simplify machinery governing inter-union relations which are of general concern to the movement".¹

The results of this proposal were presented to the Trades Union Congress held in Edinburgh in September 1941. The final classification of replies from individual unions at that time was as follows:

78 unions (membership 1,966,312) favoured general (free) recognition of trade union cards.²

22 unions (membership 274,734) favoured recognition subject to a trade contribution or per capita fee.

17 unions (membership 2,262,431) were generally unfavourable to the proposals of the General Council.

A number of unions replied that they were not likely to be very much affected by the problem. In some cases, however, they gave general support to the Council's proposals for mutual recognition of cards.

Attitude of the Amalgamated Engineering Union

Among the unions that opposed the scheme were a few important unions in the munitions and metal-working industries, including the Amalgamated Engineering Union. The A.E.U. has insisted that anyone employed in that industry must become a member of the Union, pay entrance fees, and have a clear trade union card. Members transferred from other industries join what is known as the Temporary Section of the Union and are affected by the general arrangements governing dilution in the engineering industry. The policy of the Union, as described to the 1941 Trades Union Congress, is as follows:

We have never said to any trade unionist coming into the engineering industry "You must drop your card". What we have said is this: "These are jobs which custom and practice, shall we say, have given to members of the A.E.U. If you come into the industry and do these jobs, then you must pay your contribution to this organisation, not only for the work that it is doing on behalf of its own

¹ The plan of the General Council was published in *Labour* (official organ of the T.U.C.), Aug. 1940, pp. 570-571.

² A list of the unions which agreed to operate the system of reciprocal free recognition of trade union cards is given in the Report of the General Council to the Trades Union Congress (section 173). It includes the National Union of Railwaymen, the Engineering and Shipbuilding Draughtsmen, the Pattern-makers Association, the National Society of Painters, the Typographical Association, the National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives, the General and Municipal Workers' Union, a number of textile and hosiery workers' unions, and a variety of others.

members, but for the work that it is doing for the dilutees that are coming in." The A.E.U. is largely responsible for conditions in the engineering and munitions industry, and all we are asking of the other workers who come into the engineering industry is that they will take up a temporary card of membership in a special section that we have created. We have never said that they must drop their own card. They can continue to be members of their original organisation.¹

The General Council met in February 1941 with the executive officers of the unions that were unfavourable to its scheme, in order to see whether agreement on some kind of uniform scheme was not possible. The initiative was without success, however. The Report made by the Council to the 1941 Congress stated: "The unions represented were not prepared to modify their policy, and the General Council reluctantly came to the conclusion that further progress along those lines was impossible".²

A confidential circular was sent to the unions which had stated that they were in favour of the principle of reciprocal free recognition, giving a list of such unions and advising that they should put the principle into practice among themselves. A further circular was sent to unions that had stated a preference for recognition of cards subject to a trade contribution or per capita fee, asking whether they wished to associate themselves with this limited scheme of reciprocal free recognition of cards; and a number of such unions replied that they did wish to take part in this scheme.

MODEL INTER-UNION AGREEMENT BASED ON THE GENERAL COUNCIL'S SCHEME

The following agreement between the National Union of General and Municipal Workers and the National Union of Distributive and Allied Workers illustrates the individual arrangements for recognition of union cards made between certain unions and based on the principles put forward by the General Council.³

Memorandum of Agreement (dated 17 May 1941) between the National Union of General and Municipal Workers on the one hand, and the National Union of Distributive and Allied Workers on the other, relating to War Emergency Regulations for the mutual recognition of the cards of the members of each Union, wherein

It is agreed:

(1) That where a member of one of the unions signatories to this agreement during the period of the war enters into a factory, workshop, or department in which the other union is established and holds the working agreements with the employers, his (or her) existing trade union card will be recognised in full on the distinct understanding that he (or she) will in all respects work under and abide by the terms of the agreement negotiated with the employer by the "recognising union".

(2) That such recognition shall continue for the period of such employment during the war, provided that the worker concerned remains a fully paid-up member of his (or her) "original union".

¹ *Report of Proceedings at the Seventy-Third Annual Trades Union Congress* (Edinburgh, 1-4 Sept. 1941), p. 332.

² *Ibid.*, p. 171.

³ Cf. *The New Dawn*, 19 July 1941, p. 227.

(3) That the member's "original union" shall be responsible for the maintenance of all services and benefits to which the member is normally entitled, except that the "original union" will not be concerned with, or take any part in, trade negotiations.

(4) The "recognising union" will continue to be responsible for all negotiations in respect of all the employees in the factory, workshop, or department as the case may be, and the member whose card is recognised will work under the discipline of the "recognising union". The officers of the "recognising union" shall exercise complete authority with regard to the conditions under which the worker is employed in the factory, workshop, or department.

(5) That at no time and under no circumstances will the member whose card is recognised by the "recognising union" act as a recruiting agent for, or seek to extend the influence of, his "original union" in the factory, workshop, or department where he (or she) is employed, neither shall he (or she) act in any way prejudicial to the interests of the "recognising union".

(6) The worker to whom such recognition is given shall at least once every four weeks produce his (or her) trade union membership card to the shop steward, local branch secretary, or other responsible officer of the "recognising union", and satisfy such officer that he (or she) is a fully paid-up member of his (or her) "original union".

(7) That this agreement shall be regarded as a temporary war emergency measure, and shall have effect as from the 12th day of May, 1941, and that any question arising subsequent to the signing of the agreement but not provided for therein shall be the subject of mutual negotiations with a view to reaching a settlement satisfactory to both parties.

Since some of the most important trade unions in munitions work and engineering have not yet agreed to the general plan for the mutual recognition of union cards, but instead continue to lay down unilaterally the conditions governing the admission of new members, the plan of the General Council, as incorporated in inter-union agreements, does not yet cover many workers who have been transferred to more essential work. It is probable, however, that the scope of such agreements will broaden considerably, because the majority of the trade unions are co-operating whole-heartedly to overcome the difficulties involved and tend to stress to an increasing extent the solidarity of the trade union movement as a whole.

The Amalgamated Engineering Union, although maintaining its refusal to participate in the general scheme, has been making agreements on an individual basis, for example, in connection with the transfer of a number of textile workers to munitions work in a particular district. "We have reached very definite agreement with organisations that are bringing their members into the engineering industry", one of the A.E.U. delegates told the 1941 Trades Union Congress, "and we are prepared to continue to make agreements with other organisations . . ."; adding, "but we certainly are not prepared to give up our right to allow a large number of workers in other unions to come in without the A.E.U. having some say in respect of the conditions, wages and other matters connected with work for which we shall be responsible".¹ This reservation, however, does not conflict with the principles of the scheme of the General Council. Moreover, the Edinburgh Congress of the Trades Union

¹ *Report of Proceedings at the Seventy-Third Annual Trades Union Congress*, p. 332.

Congress, held in September 1941, adopted by a vote of 3,399,000 to 1,482,000, a resolution endorsing the policy of the General Council in endeavouring to secure agreement between affiliated unions on the general recognition of membership cards, and continuing:

Congress is of opinion that as the transfer of workers from peacetime to essential war work is a purely temporary measure, those trade unionists so transferred should receive recognition of their trade union card under one of the schemes originally put forward by the General Council, and instructs the Council to take further steps to implement this policy.¹

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 326.