

FUNDING the French debt appears to be a question we shall always have with us. President Coolidge gravely proclaims that this debt must be paid in full; every consideration of national honor and of international financial expediency demands it. Very well; the same considerations demand the payment by France of her debt to England as well. The sad fact persists that France can't pay either of these debts. For ten years the most she is likely to do is to balance her internal budget, and with interest accumulating and compounding, the debt will at the end of ten years be about twelve billions of dollars, with annual interest charges of half a billion. Is it likely that France can ever produce an export surplus sufficient to pay such an interest charge? She cannot, unless she develops a huge export trade, which would cause our own exporters grave concern and drive the Republican successors of President Coolidge to elaborate schemes for an even higher tariff than now afflicts us. And to assume that France can settle through German reparations payments is simply to chase the devil around the stump. Germany would have to develop the impossible surplus of exports.

UNDOUBTEDLY the best way out of the mess would be either to cancel the greater part of the French debt or to grant a long moratorium, without interest. But such a settlement would be obviously unfair to England, from whom we are exacting interest and amortization just as if she were not groaning under the burdens of the war. The British would have every right to protest our leniency to the French. In the game of power England and France are rivals. France, released from her obligations to pay, could spend money more freely on airplanes and submarines with which to threaten England. Our aloofness to European politics ought not to lend itself to a loading of the dice against England. Plainly it is our duty to treat France exactly as we treat England in the matter of the debt. If we grant a moratorium or reduced interest to France, we ought to revise our agreement with England, to place her on an even keel with France. We could do better than that, if we were governed intelligently. We could call a conference and wipe the slate clean of uncollectible debts and reparations that are merely a menace to the peace and economic health of Europe. But that is too much to expect of an administration whose chief quality is its lack of imagination.

The Work of Samuel Gompers

THE organization that was a few years later to become the American Federation of Labor began in 1881. In the autumn of 1885 the New York Sun delegated a reporter to "get up a story on the strength and purposes of the Knights of

Labor." The Knights were at the height of their power and influence. They possessed what many would regard, now as then, as the ingredients essential to a satisfactory labor movement. Their social program was broad and attractive; toward the unskilled of industry they took a democratic and sympathetic attitude; and they were ready to throw down the gauntlet of battle as frequently in the political, as in the economic arena. But in the next year the Haymarket bomb was thrown; and by the close of the decade the career of the Knights was ended. What there was of a labor movement was inherited by the American Federation of Labor, under the leadership of Samuel Gompers. The Federation received as its legacy a handful of members, a few in the skilled crafts, an undisciplined and impermanent residue elsewhere; internal suspicion and dissensions and a hostile public opinion.

It is not such a labor movement that Samuel Gompers left when he died last week. Imperfect as it often seems in conception and in performance, it still has all of the appearance of solidity and permanence. When every allowance is made for the industries into which it has so far failed to penetrate, the sheer magnitude of the movement remains impressive. Disputes between and within unions occur only too frequently, but they no longer shake the movement to its foundations. Now it is the exceptional and backward community in this country which does not grant its labor organizations a status and a place in its counsels and life.

Changes so profound as these do not as a rule grow out of the conscious and deliberate policy of a single man. They were, however, in large measure due to the sensitiveness of Samuel Gompers to the American industrial situation and to his understanding of the requirements of an organized labor movement. During his tenure of office the massive machine for organizing the unorganized, for carrying on the slow, detailed, dull operations of organization campaigns was constructed. At its close the steel industry is not yet organized and unions are weak in other basic industries. But in a wide range of industries, like coal, railroads, building, printing, and clothing, large and powerful unions are firmly established. From less than 250,000 members in 1890 the Federation has grown more than ten fold to its present membership of nearly 3,000,000.

At the same time the unions have come more and more to assume the character of institutions. For the most part American labor organizations are not the sort that rise and fall with a spectacular strike. Members have been taught the need of treasuries, of a staff of paid officers, of permanent offices for their control and local headquarters. Administrations may be ousted, individuals defeated for office, but the staffs of the unions like the civil service of the government, carry on from one year to the next. No strike is regarded as having had a successful issue unless it leaves in the union dues-

paying members who are determined to adhere permanently to the organization and to submit to its rules and regulations.

This process of establishing the organization and of tying members to it has likewise continued after the unions have won recognition in industry. The systems of trade agreements and of collective bargaining which are so significant a feature of American industrial relations in unionized industries give labor organizations a continuous function in industry. Whether used wisely or effectively or not, they have without question made the union the daily representative of its members in shop and factory. They constitute the foundations for most elaborate programs of workers' control, no matter how that control is defined or conceived. And in many cases the control already exercised under the terms of such agreements is much more effective than it is commonly supposed to be.

Attempts, not without success, have been made to settle disputes between unions by orderly constitutional processes. Although, during the administration of Gompers, the strong and large union has more than once swallowed up the small and weak one, and has thus achieved amalgamation by force, constant reiteration of the jurisdictional policy of the Federation has given its constituent unions assurances of security and has often stopped dualism at its source. When, as in the case of several of the building trades unions, edicts of the Executive Council were violated with seeming impunity, it was because the leaders of the Federation were unwilling to enforce a policy of consistency at the cost of destructive internal warfare.

The national union which now dominates the American labor movement could never have achieved its present position without the support of the Federation. The contrast between a scattered and decentralized labor movement, composed of many autonomous local unions, and the centralized form of labor organization now prevailing in this country is too striking to allow an underestimate of the contribution of the Federation in this regard. In no country of the world is the competitive industrial area so extensive as in the United States. Nowhere, also, are individual employers and groups of them so powerful as here. No American labor movement could successfully have faced these conditions without a unified policy and consolidated resources.

In the reaction to what often appears to have been the political impotence of the Federation, its political policy has been subjected to strong and constant criticism. This attitude overlooks the genuine, if unostentatious, achievement of the Federation in this field. The influence of the many city and state federations of labor in this country is known to the state legislatures and city councils even if it is not appreciated by the general public. From the passage of laws establishing state industrial commissions to the enactment of workmen's compensa-

tion legislation, these local agencies of the American Federation of Labor have been real sources of political power. To compare their achievements with those of an independent labor party is an exercise worthy of speculation, but it is a mistake, on the record, to minimize the magnitude of their contribution.

Much of the suspicion and hostility which has surrounded the activities of American trade unions has been, throughout most of the country, largely dissipated. Even the outlook for a decent legal status is now not nearly so dark as it was when Gompers was held for contempt of court for violating the injunction in the Buck's Stove and Range Company case. The uninterrupted pounding on the courts and the injunction for more than a generation has had its slow but certain effects. It is possible now to speak of the future widening activities of labor unions without, in the same breath, apologizing for them and justifying their existence. Success in reassuring the public is, no doubt, in part due to the accident of war, which gave Gompers the opportunity to enunciate the aims and methods of a labor movement, in terms calculated to win confidence and support. Here, too, Gompers may not, as some believe, have acted in all wisdom and made the most of his opportunities and influence. But that his policy produced a distinct turn in public opinion cannot be denied.

It is not easy, in the light of the experience of the American Federation of Labor, to separate the ideology from the problems and accomplishments of a mass movement. During Gompers's long term the task before the leaders of trade unionism was that of building foundations, winning recognition, and establishing a status. The ideas of the labor movement in this period were as much, if not more, the outgrowth of these practical requirements as of the views and desires of its leaders. It is not at all clear that this first phase in the history of the American labor movement is ended. When it is, the movement will require a fresh and more imaginative ideology and a new type of leader to make the new program effective.

The Goose-Step and the Golden Eggs

DURING the past few weeks two American millionaires have announced gifts totaling considerably more than fifty million dollars. All of Mr. Eastman's benefaction and a considerable lump of Mr. Duke's go to collegiate educational institutions. It is an educational event of large magnitude, but one that will be greeted by different people with different emotions. Mr. Upton Sinclair and such readers as found the Goose-Step a book worthy implicit belief will doubtless gnash their teeth. We can almost see the Pasadena prophet