

August, 1890.

FEDERATING AUSTRALASIAN LABOUR.

THE Australian Labour Federation will be a failure if it does not plant its principles wherever Australian workers are gathered together. It is not a Queensland organisation, although it was born here and has won here its infantile triumphs; there is nothing in its constitution, not a single word, which can be interpreted as expressing a narrow localism on the part of the unions which founded it or of those which have one by one come to swell its numbers and increase its strength. It expresses simply the organisation instinct which to-day moves the workers of the whole world and which is nowhere felt more ardently than on the new-found continent of Australia and its sister islands. Union after union has seen that there is in the Federation movement the happy mean between the Unity which makes for strength and the Liberty which makes for progress. Men of diverse callings and distant dwellings, but of common thought and common aspirations, have realised that under the Federation flag they can stand linked in unbreakable phalanx together while retaining to the fullest extent that local self-government which is so rightly dear to men of English-speaking stock. Because of this the Federation movement has swept unchecked through Queensland in one short year. It has become the duty of Queensland to urge the older sections of Australia to take up the good work and carry it on till from Torres Straits to the Great Bight and from Maoriland to Perth a quarter-million unionists move as one man for the common Labour Cause.

We have all agreed and we have been most right that Queensland leads. So she has, as Jondaryan witnesses, and so she does, as the General Council, whereat bushmen and miners and waterside men and artisans and labourers now sit round the table together, unequivocally tells. And Queensland might lead still, for a generation perhaps if she were selfish, for a century perhaps if she had no higher ambition than to pose as a leader in petty aims. But she has a higher ambition, a nobler aspiration, a purer, truer feeling; she does not care whether Queensland leads or not so long as Australia moves.

The Federation movement is only ours in trust, ours to treasure and safeguard, ours to hold as a sacred thing not for ourselves alone but for every awakening worker in our island-world. What is it to us that its head quarters should be in Brisbane or at Charters Towers or on the Barcoo? If we regard it as it is worth regarding our only desire will be to plant its head quarters where they will be most advantageous to all Australians, our highest aim will be to make Queensland not the chief of antagonistic sections, but

the most faithful and the most self-sacrificing of any. We have spread Federation from end to end of our own colony and so far it is good. But if we would see Federation truly triumph we must lay down our pride and stifle our egotism and voluntarily fall into line with those for whom we have borne the burden and heat of the day. Our reward must be that the Cause of Labour is strengthened; our satisfaction must be found in the thought of what self-abnegation can do.

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It may be that if we sent our missionary-organisers over the borders, to the shearers, to the labourers, to the miners, to the maritime men and even to the town tradesmen, that we could swallow up *their* affiliations and bear down any opposition by the dead-weight of closer organisation. But even supposing we could would we care to do that, would it be worthy of us, would we have done our best if we had planted envy and hatred in the hearts of earnest men working along other lines? And what a shallow triumph it would be, what a hollow victory, what a mockery, if we eventually succeed in splitting the Australian Labour army into rival divisions of which one centred in Queensland and another somewhere else. There is no need for any division, none, if we will only be true to ourselves and loyal to the Federation Cause, if we will only strip ourselves of self-seeking and will remember what we mean when we say: "Labour is One."

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There to the southward and the eastward are 200,000 men ready to federate, men who feel as we do and think as we do and act as we do, men who stand by us to fight the Jondaryan wool and to whom the Federation tacitly pledges in return loyal and faithful brotherhood. It depends on us whether they will take up that which we have found good, profiting by our experience, avoiding our mistakes, coming at once together, the whole 200,000, in one huge organised mass which throughout recognises the same obligations and works under the same constitution; or whether they will federate in detached masses, in isolated colonies, under sometimes antagonistic rules which a generation may not assimilate together. The future of Labour Organisation in Australasia depends now upon Queensland and she will not be our Queensland if she does not show that she can realise her responsibility and do her duty whatever the personal cost may be.

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It is not enough that Queensland should preach
Federation to the South. She must find others to
preach it. She must take the laurels of success-
ful leadership from her brow and hand them over
for others to win and wear. It is sectional
jealousy which weakens Australian Labour, the
foolish sectional jealousy of New South Wales
for Victoria and of each other colony for each
other one. Only because each colony aspires to
be first is Unity difficult; only because each
feels ashamed of following the lead of another
does the danger of localism arise; and if a great
example is given of sectional fidelity and sec-
tional self-sacrifice it will slay this foolish and
unworthy jealousy as no mere organisation suc-
cess ever did or ever can. If Queensland will
only say to the Southern miners and honours and
labourers and railwaymen and waterside men
and artisans—"Take over the federation leader-
ship, take our amended constitution and re-
maind it if you will, settle where head quarters
shall be, no matter where, join with us
in appointing a Supreme Executive, and as
long as you do not interfere any more with
rightful sectional authority than the A.L.F.
already interferes with rightful district authority,
you will find Queensland as ready to follow as
she has been to lead;" the Australian Labour
Federation inside another year would be Aus-
tralian indeed.

For the Federation feeling has already overstepped the border, not waiting for mere formal announcement but borne on the wings of thought to the waiting minds of men. The A.S.U., true to its pledge, has carried forward the Q.S.U. work of labourer organisation and brought face to face with antagonistic squatters has appealed to the same waterside men who answered the A.L.F. call so well. Southward the Federation battle-ground has shifted, southward where the Federation spirit moves thousands and tens of thousands who only need a cheery word to hoist the Federation flag and stand by it to the end. The miners of Newcastle feel it for on the Hunter there will be no coal for non-union ships any more than there will be ships for non-union wool. This is Federation indeed; yet the method of federation is important, and it lies with Queensland as to just what form this shall take.

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Though the guiding reins of the Federation passed away from Queensland yet she would lose nothing of real value and in exchange for a sentimental loss she would gain tremendously, gaining in exact ratio with the increasing totality of Federation strength. If Federation in its infancy caused tyrannical employers to pause what would it do when every ounce of wool and every pound of coal and every cubic foot of freightage, the three keystone industries, were worked wholly and solely by federated labour, and when behind the humblest worker lay a collective strength which on emergency could cope on an equality with any likely combination of inimical capitalists. The constitution of the A.L.F. conserves carefully the rights of every union in it, so by no conceivable development could sectional rights be over-ridden. The only thing to be surrendered is a barren honour, a mere empty prestige, which, precious as it may seem now, will be as nothing when once we have offered it up as a sacrifice to the Labour Cause.

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There is another gain through wide-spread Federation, a gain which though often overlooked is in reality the greatest gain of all. The unity of action which organisation makes possible is of a value which can be counted in £ s. d. by comparison of wages scales and working rules "before" and "after," but the unity of thought it leads up to cannot be estimated. If the social order is ever to be changed; if the worker is ever to receive the full fruits of his labouring; and if Social Justice is ever to sit supreme over our industrial system; it can only be because the millions become possessed of a common truth and determined at one and the same time upon reform. The new labour movement which we hardly realise because we are in it and of it is an unconscious recognition of this. We are beginning dimly to understand that it is the competitive system itself which is at fault and not any capitalistic or blackleg products of that system. Men feel with daily increasing intensity that unless they radically change that system in harmonious evolution with the developing possibilities of human society all their "cornering" of the labour market and all their labour organisation work will be as useless as if unionism had never been. And every fresh surging of the rising tide of social democracy, every echo of the desperate blows being struck all around us at the worn out industrial methods which rob and degrade and brutalise, force upon us the eternal truth that mere sectional borders do not make a community, that those whom a common language and a common country and a common ideal have made one must act together and work out together their common destiny. When from end to end of Australasia one common thought moulds and welds the Organisation of Labour, when from every port and every town and every mining field and every scattered station one