

THE AGRICULTURAL BUREAU.

To the Editor.

Sir.—I have an unbounded admiration for those willing and unselfish workers who drive an organisation campaign among farmers, and whose only reward is the vision of a prosperous farming community for the benefit of the whole of Tasmania. The aim is glorious. But as to the means of achieving this aim I have my misgivings. There is too much sentiment in it and, I am afraid, even sentimentality, while commonsense is deplorably lacking.

Usually it is thought that farmers are very hard to organise. Probably the nature of their occupation makes farmers appear somewhat individualistic, but it is only a superficial appearance, inseparable from farming; in essence they are the same crowd of humanity as any other crowd of different occupations, with the same limitations and the same potentialities.

Crowd. . . In this word lies the answer to the whole mystery of organising: either its success or failure.

However ingeniously the idea of organisation is conceived, however beneficial it seems to be, yet the organisation is doomed to failure if the psychology of crowd and human nature are not taken into consideration.

It is only on rare occasions, once in a century or even centuries, that the crowd becomes animated and permeated with an idea and sustains it for years, as in the case of the First Crusade or, to some extent, the Great War. But usually the crowd cannot be taken seriously. It is the only tenet of G. K. Chesterton that I agree with. The crowd is nothing more than grown-up children; children, fond of play, fond of having a hero to applaud to, easily fatigued from physical exertions and wanting rest and entertainment, but above all detesting mental exertion, very often incapable of it, and always trying to avoid it by every possible means, consciously or unconsciously.

No organisation could be sound, if these fundamental truths about crowd are not considered. And if we look round for examples, we shall find that the simplest organisations are the strongest. Australian labor organisations are easily the strongest organisations of crowd not only in Australia, but, probably, in the whole world. However is it achieved? What is demanded by these organisations from their members? Nothing more but to pay their membership fees. Their duty towards organisation begins and ends by this simple act. The crowd composing organisations is never bothered by regular meetings, and I fancy, if an alternative was offered to members—either to pay double fees or to attend regular meetings—the average member would prefer the first.

Yet in spite of this flimsy and even burdensome (for a member) connection between organisation and its members, the labor organisations are really strong. What gives them strength and keeps members within the organisation?

Dimly every member understands that organisations really are responsible for the improvement in his standard of living, his economic and even social conditions. But it is not this that keeps him within the organisation. He might even agree that every worker shares equally in the improvement of conditions, no matter whether he is in the organisation or not. Only a worker far above the average in his intelligence will stick to organisation just on this ground. For an ordinary worker, to keep him within the organisation something more tangible and immediate is wanted.

Dimly workers, to keep him within the organisation something more tangible and immediate is wanted.

The leaders of labor organisation know it very well, and propounding far-reaching benefits of organisations and the idealistic side of them, they look for something cruder and more immediate that would be within an easy grasp of the crowd, something that would be made convincing by a touch of compulsion. They have found it in the word "preference," and they have made the most exhaustive use of it.

There is hardly any private employment in the Commonwealth where "preference to unionists" has not been exploited and enforced one time or the other, at least, in all the more important employments. There is no public service that is not subject to "preference," and even unions' supervision. Only one thorn remains in unions' "preference," and that is the preference to returned soldiers. That thorn is very annoying. And when the present Federal Government dared to raise its hand against "soldiers' preference," Ministers realised that this act would be regarded by the bulk of the Australians almost like sacrilege. Yet they dared to "heard the lion in his den" at the risk of injuring their own prestige and even authority. Why did Labor Government go to such an extremity? Because it must be very important. The soldiers' preference is undermining not simply unionists' preference — it is undermining unions' strength. Give two or three more such organisations as returned soldiers' organisations, backed by people's sympathy, and unions will go to pieces. The idealistic side of unions will not hold them together for ten minutes. The idealistic side of unionism is only an ornament. The sordid reality of compulsion is its foundation and strength.

Turning again to the Agricultural Bureau, we find that it is founded on different principles. For a "sentimental bloke" the constitution of the Agricultural Bureau would afford a relieving feature of humanity. Members of the Bureau are totally disregarded as a crowd, and every individual member is presumed to be of a high intellectual standard, capable of absorbing the ideal of organisation and sustaining it without any element of compulsion. Monthly meetings, with a highly complicated system of recording, reading and confirming minutes, cast, no doubt,

on parliamentary pattern, might be impressive or soporiferous, depending on circumstances, but least of all useful.

Then comes such a sentimentality as calves' clubs or pet lamb. Gentlemen, awake! We are not in a pastoral community. We are living thousands of years too late for it, and our boys and girls prefer radio.

I am most anxious not to be misunderstood. I am all for the Agricultural Bureau. It is vital not only for Tasmanian farmers, but for all Tasmania. In our gloomy time I regard it as the only bright spot that gives us hope of a better future. And just for this reason I want to see it stronger than it is.

Alterations in the Agricultural Bureau constitution are imperative. The present constitution expects from members more than they can give. It idealises human nature, instead of taking it as it is. If monthly meetings were informed, they would be quite popular. Farmers like to come together and discuss their common interests, but they are bored by formalities. And if any branch doesn't meet at all, it doesn't do much harm, provided they pay their membership fees. Active branches are useful, but the strength of

they pay their membership fees. Active branches are useful, but the strength of the Bureau rests on an energetic, brainy and honest executive.

A sort of compulsion is essential. It is easy to devise some preference when marketing members' or non-members' produce. I hear an angry interruption: But is it right? Gentlemen, don't be so simple. Might always was right, and always will be. Besides, preference to members would be right in the truest sense of this word. If Tasmanian farmers ever improve their condition, it will be only through their organisation as a whole, and every member in particular. Is it not right to give a little encouragement to those who deserve it?

I am confident that my plea for simplification and commonsense in the Agricultural Bureau will be shared by all the thoughtful members and friends of the Bureau. At the present time the Bureau is ailing from complexity. Death is the penalty for complexity. It is the law of nature. The stability of organisms (even chemical elements) is in reverse ratio to their complexity. Unicellular amoeba is immortal.

May I give a warning to our Agricultural Bureau and suggest that this law of nature is applicable not only to organisms but to organisations as well?

Yours, etc.,

S. SUTCHKOFF.

Edith Creek.