

# A Guild of Builders for London.

By MALCOLM SPARKES, Secretary of the Guild  
of Builders (London) Limited.

The issue of the preliminary prospectus of The Guild of Builders (London) Ltd. by the London District Council of the National Federation of Building Trade Operatives may prove to be one of Trade Unionism, with great influence upon the boldest and most dramatic acts in the history of the future housing programme of the country. In their covering letter to professional associations, employers' associations and the Press, the Operatives' Federation states that—

The enclosed prospectus is offered as a real contribution towards the establishment of the great system of National Guilds that, before many years are over, is destined to revolutionise completely the motives and control of industry.

The national development of the same scheme is to be presented to the Building Trades Parliament, next August, for serious investigation and discussion by the representative assembly of the industry.

Much will depend upon the response of the skilled administrators and technicians to the call of the Guild. Some of these are already holding salaried positions—others are, at present, in the ranks of the employers.

We hope to enrol them, for a greater task, in a self-governing comradeship of organised public service that will give them freer scope and open up wider possibilities of initiative and enterprise than the old discredited system can ever hope to do.

In many points the prospectus is indefinite and incomplete. It is designedly so. We have done no more than sketch the broad foundations upon which the superstructure of new industry will be built up by the men who offer themselves for Guild service.

We have planned a constitution which is simple—flexible—admitting of great variety of experimental development—yet designed to secure, for the service of the public, the immense advantages of industrial combination.

The housing needs of the community are of pressing urgency. The Guild calls for volunteers from every grade in the building industry, and we are confident that it will not call in vain.

The outstanding feature of this document is its call for volunteers *from every grade* in the building industry: a group of big trade unions has actually set up the framework of the new industrial order—has boldly abolished all class distinctions—and has called for offers of service from administrators, architects, surveyors, engineers, accountants, as well as from the ranks of its own operative members.

If a real industrial revolution can be brought about in this businesslike fashion it will be an achievement of almost incalculable significance and importance, not only for one industry but for many others, and not only for our own country but for the world.

The prospectus itself is a very novel document full of interesting features, for it is phrased in the new language of self-governing industrial democracy. Its appeal is entirely to the creative impulses of human nature—it calls not for money but for volunteers.

Instead of the time-honoured formula which begins, "Having paid to the company's bankers . . . I request you to allot me . . ." etc., etc., we have the following adventurous declaration:

"I have read the prospectus and hereby volunteer for Guild service." Then follow the name and address, and the trade union or professional association, and particulars of special qualifications.

The structure of the legal entity is simple and easily understood. The trade union ticket is the certificate of Guild membership. Every member of every branch of the National Federation of Building Trade Operatives, and other approved groups of building trade workers in the district, is a Guildsman, and has a vote in the election of the Guild Committee. Each trade or group elects one member. Each member so elected takes up a one shilling share in a society registered under the Industrial and Provident Societies Act, and deposits a signed open transfer with his electors, or their agent, thus giving them power to remove him at any time.

This "approved group" system is one of the most suggestive and valuable features of the scheme. Already an important group of technicians (the architects and surveyors group) have applied for and secured approval from the Guild committee and have appointed Mr. A. J. Penty as their representative.

The local Guild committees now being formed in several districts are also eligible as "approved groups," and the Walthamstow committee has now appointed its representative.

The Guild committee when registered\* becomes an incorporated society under the Industrial and Provident Societies Acts, with limited liability; it has power to enter into contracts, to raise loans or issue loan stock and to "carry on the industry of builders, decorators, and general contractors—to undertake all branches of supply, whether as merchant, manufacturer or transporter—and to carry on any other work which it may think necessary or desirable." But it is not a self-governing workshop. It is an entirely new departure in industrial control: for its managers are responsible through the Guild committee, not only to their own staffs, but to the whole of the organised building trade workers of the district. This gives them greater security and status without weakening the principle of democratic control.

\*The Guilds of Builders, both for London and High Wycombe, have been registered through the Garden Cities and Town Planning Association. The form of rules has been prepared after careful consideration, and with the object of providing a standard constitution that may be adopted by other Building Guilds throughout the country. Copies of the rules may be obtained price 1s. postage 2d.