

Building Guilds.

The Building Guild that was to be formed in Wellington by the disappointed carpenters whose pay was reduced to 2s. 9d. per hour recently by the Wellington master builders is still in the embryo stage of development. The "Guild" idea is being tried out in England at the present time, and the Walthamstow Urban District Council has let a contract to the Guild of Builders (London), Limited, for 400 houses estimated to cost £400,000, which experiment will be watched with the keenest interest. In a recent article, "Solving Housing in England," Mr. Malcolm Sparkes says:—

"Amid all the tremendous chaos of the present industrial situation, the rise of the Guild of Builders stands out clear-cut and strong, a great fact from which we can take courage. Planned by men who believe that it is far more important to build up a new system than to destroy the old, it is a deliberate attempt to establish here and now a serious instalment of that new industrial order for which everyone is looking. And with the signature of its first contract—the Walthamstow Housing Scheme—the curtain rings up on one of the most adventurous experiments of our time.

The Guild is based upon the National Federation of Building Trade Operatives, the London section of which embraces twelve trade unions with 60,000 men. As the Trade Union Ticket is the certificate of Guild membership, both Guild and Federation are really the same people, organised for different purposes. The Federation regulates industrial conditions; the Guild builds houses. The control in each case rests with the rank and file, and the whole structure is very simple and easily understood.

A guild is a self-governing democracy of organised public service, with the whole team pulling together for the common purpose. The time-honoured criticism that the workers cannot control industry because they know nothing about business disappears before the fact that the Guild of Builders includes in its ranks every type of building trade expert that there is, whether administrative, technical, or operative. Guild control is control by the people who do the work, instead of control by the people who put up the money. Every essential function in the industry is therefore represented on the Guild Committee.

THE OPERATIVE BRICKLAYERS' SOCIETY.

The Operative Bricklayers' Society elect their man, the carpenters and joiners theirs, the painters, plumbers, plasterers, masons, etc., theirs.

The committee thus constituted has power to approve other associations or groups of building trade workers, and this is how the technicians come in. Under this clause, the architects' and sur-

vveyors' groups have already elected their representative; a group of civil engineers is being formed; and a further group of decorative painters and sculptors is under consideration. Here, also, come the local Guild Committees. The Walthamstow Committee has a representative; Greenwich has another, and ten more are to follow.

From this it will be seen that the London Guild Committee will ultimately consist of some 25 to 30 members, about half of whom will be responsible to the craft unions or other approved functional organisations, and about half to the local Guild Committees. The London Guild Committee thus forms the legal entity. It has already been registered as "The Guild of Builders (London), Ltd." All committee men are directors, each holds one shilling share, and all are removable by their associations.

The labour of the guildsmen will not be treated as a mere commodity like bricks or timber, to be purchased as required and discarded when done with. When the financial arrangements are complete, pay will be continuous, in sickness or accident, in bad weather or in good. The word unemployment, as we used to understand it, is to be ruled out of the dictionary, let us hope, forever.

The contract just signed with the Walthamstow Urban District Council will probably be the model for many others. It creates a great triple alliance in which the Guild undertakes the whole of the work; the Co-operative Wholesale Society supplies the materials; and the Co-operative Insurance Society guarantees due performance of the contract—the liability under this head, however, being limited to one-fifth of the contract price. This price is the actual net prime cost of materials and labour at standard rates plus £40 per house to enable the Guild to guarantee a full week to each of its workers, and six per cent. on the estimated cost as given in the Guild tender. Payments are to begin at the end of the first week and to continue weekly, the cost of plant and administration being met out of the six per cent.

It is the size of the contract that makes the six per cent. fully sufficient for administration and equipment. The number of houses to be built at Walthamstow by the Guild is 400, and the estimated cost amounts to very nearly £400,000. It is anticipated that three per cent. of this sum would be more than sufficient to provide first-class equipment of every kind. Already the Guild has secured a splendid plant of wood-working machinery, most of which is being installed on the site. The payment for this and other equipment is made possible by an advance by the Co-operative Wholesale Society's bank, secure against payments falling due under the contract.