THE ENGINE BUILDERS' ASSOCIATION OF A GENERATION AGO

MANY who indulge in Association meetings sponsored by the N.R.A. are under the impression that they are participating in the very latest of business economic fashions. Actually our predecessors on the business scene were not unaware of the need for rectifying trade practice evils, and there was hardly an industry in which individual members did not at one time or another try to organize an association to set down rules and regulations whereby the individual members could compete with one another in an ethical manner.

Usually, though, after several meetings of a newly formed Association, some rugged individualist would pull an ace out of his boot and when called by the Association for his shortcomings, would start shooting up the place. The war would then be on again more bitter than ever before. Showing that to make business men act toward one another as human beings the mailed fist must be ready to strike. The heavy penalties for violations of the present Codes of fair competition should overcome the weaknesses of former trade Associations and make it possible for business to be conducted on a plane earnestly desired by our predecessors.

And now a little history, and a case in point.

Thirty-five years ago a number of steam engine builders, impressed with the advantages that might come from a closer acquaintance and a comparison of ideas and methods, met together to consider the possibility of realizing these benefits through formal organization. After several informal meetings, these people extended to all builders of high-speed engines an invitation to meet with them at the Hotel Marlborough in New York on Dec. 7, 1899. At this meeting the Engine Builders' Association of the United States came into existence. It is interesting to note some of the men and companies represented. There were John E. Sweet, of the Straight Line Engine Co. of Syracuse, W. M. Taylor of Chandler & Taylor Co., Indianapolis, W. R. Fleming of the Harrisburg Foundry & Machine Co. of Harrisburg, F. P. Ide of A. L. Ide & Son, Springfield, Ill., and many other pioneers of the engine business.

The committees which were formed give a very good idea of the purposes of the organization. There were committees on Finance, Printing and Publication, Entertainment, Credits, Standardization and Organic Union. The names of the various committees are self-explanatory except the latter one, which was for the purpose apparently of trying to bring in the outside members of the industry and to maintain cordial relations between individuals. Besides the usual officers, there were elected seven members of a Council, which it is presumed was to be what we would now call the Code authority.

A pamphlet was issued containing data to be used as arguments to impress prospective members with the desirability of joining. This pamphlet states as the object of the Association:

1. The advancement of engineering knowledge and practice.
2. Cultivating a mutual respect and acquaintance, and the maintenance of a high professional standard among members.
3. Cooperation in matters of mutual interest.
4. The correcting of abuses.
5. Comparing and standardizing methods.
6. Promoting economy in operation.
7. Giving a better opportunity for work to employees.
8. Improved service to the public.

They were apparently able greatly to increase the size of the membership, although they were unable to get all engine builders to join. No wonder. There were more than thirty concerns in the business, as the pamphlet says, engaging six millions of capital, employing five thousand men, and producing an output of ten million dollars.

Mr. Sweet, as President, was the guiding spirit of the Association. A paper on Standardization which he read before the Association in April, 1900, presents in a very clear and concise manner the troubles encountered by the lack of standards. He speaks of the difficulties experienced in obtaining shaft standards for pulleys, which apparently at that time were made of merchant's round bar iron, and the difficulties of machining a 1/16 in. from a bar. He states that only those who had the best facilities could make a 2 1/16-in. shaft out of a 2 1/2-in. bar, and mentions the lack of standards in