

## England's Engineers

Engineers have recently fought for the repeal of the Munitions of War Amendment Bill. For that particular purpose they fought solidly and well. The masters tried their damndest to beat and overwhelm them with lies and conquer them with hunger. They placarded the Midland towns with crafty official notices. They tried to split the strike with lies and scorn and they tried to split it with bribes and threats. Yet the engineers ignored splendidly the Government promises, official and outside opinion, together with the cowardly threats.

For years the engineers were half-asleep. Hopefully, innocently, patriotically, they abandoned all those rules which they held to be valuable and precious in their union. Soon after the original sacrifice, as early in the war as the Autumn of 1914, they were bound to the benches and engines by sheaves of laws. Act after Act took away their strength as a fighting union. The men they trusted told them that the Allies could never win the war if the union remained as strong, or the men as free, as in the days of peace, so the engineers, like other large bodies, cheerfully gave over the ripest of their plans of advancement, the richest of their trade-union possessions. For it was promised by those they trusted that not a hair of their heads would be hurt through any concessions they made.

Then Acts were passed in a trice; rapidly passed, almost secretly passed, so that after a few months of warfare the workers of Britain had their customary weapons of defence broken or blunted and the finest of trade union safeguards cast into the official dust-bin. The engineers, like the rest, surrendered the trade-union defences of their personal welfare in what they considered to be the national interest. The unions were emasculated.

Then thought these men, surely there can be no harm in this. By the might of our numbers we can easily enough recover at our will what we give away freely. So they believed the finely-spun tales that were told. Yet still in their minds was a little nervous doubt which a generation of conflict had stamped there. Nevertheless the first months passed away silently enough. This and that call passed ringing through the land. At a word from some chief the munitions wheels went whirring on continuously through a lengthening day. What the engineers had to give they gave generously, without murmur or question. Then England became more deeply involved in the Continental struggle. Side by side with that new vast entanglement came the pinch of direct hardship in the engineers' conditions. Then they first felt the discomforts and misery of the new laws, which were fashioned in the days they had almost forgotten. There was no relief from their insufferable toil. Holidays were stroked out. The intense strain, which commonly they experience, was increased. The Government pacified them with flattery and their trusted men lectured them on patience. Nevertheless the engineers began to regret the day when they broke their own weapons of defence and made their unions a dead letter.

At last the oppression became so unbearable, the injustice so apparent, that little scrappy revolts and outbreaks ensued. It was seen that trusted and prominent men, both Parliamentarians and trade union officials, were associated with every piece of legislation that fettered the workers more. As these outbreaks were only spasmodic

they were easily over-ridden by the ruling class. The Clyde trouble of Christmas 1915 is perhaps the best specimen of these sectional and local revolts. The principle of the men was strong, but they were driven down by lies, hunger, victimisation, deportation of their leaders, and, what is more important still, because the strike was local.

It is the mass of engineers only, and not a locality of engineers, who can successfully fight. Ten thousand engineers on strike in a town may gain something in a month for that town's men—or they may not; fifty thousand spread over one industrial area may force amendments to an objectionable Bill from a reluctant Cabinet, while one hundred and fifty thousand men who leave their engines, with all their force concentrated on one particular principle, striking at a vitally important time, stand a good chance of getting what they ask for.

Though at the time of writing there is still some doubt as to the issue, the men may get entirely or largely what they want. Their demands are small. Such a strike is just a little barrier raised against a perfidious and dangerous enemy, a little wall between the engineers and their life-long and inveterate foe, the master class. Soon there will be fights for different purposes, fights for higher principles, fights for nobler conditions, fights for a more peaceful and prosperous basis to life and what not.

The efforts of the engineers are making for the repeal of the Munitions of War Amendment Act, considering they have no strike pay, considering the domestic suffering, starvation almost, which must follow this state of things, is splendid. But if the strike shows how closely industrial slavery is allied to Parliamentary action, what trivial improvements reforms effect, how unreliable the labour leaders are, it will be invaluable as a practical lesson to the engineers and their kindred of other unions.

Let it be seen, too, that if all the things the engineers demand in this strike are conceded by the Government, still will these proven enemies of the workers be left in full command of the Parliamentary power, which they will use more craftily against the workers at a later date.

However, considering the difficulties in their way, the engineers' struggle has been splendid. At this point our sympathy with them must stop. They have found no new key to the prevention of these periodic upheavals, in which they fight for ordinary human conditions. They must find other principles for which they can fight as solidly as they have done (up to the time of writing) for the repeal of the Munitions of War Amendment Bill and the upholding of the Trade Card system.

Slowly, too slowly, the workers are finding out their true friends and true principles, their cunning enemies and their delusive ways. The change they make must be vaster than the repeal or modification of one Bill or the establishment of one unconnected wish. The thing that would bring them rest and peace can be done with one wish stroke. Instead of abandoning the political machine to ambitious wiseacres and unscrupulous plotters, and letting them, in the secrecy of Cabinet conclaves, everlastingly scheme to set the social changes on you, see to it that those who are now proven the enemies of your class are no longer sent to represent you. Fill their places with class-conscious men of your own ranks, controlled and guaranteed by the political organisation of your own class.

Engineers! At an early date you will be confronted with other trouble. We want your demands to be more exacting, and more deep the principles you struggle for. Fight with your brothers of other industries for these bigger and nobler things as earnestly and solidly as you recently fought. Fight politically as well as industrially, then, with the principle of the class struggle to guide your fighting, you cannot help but win.

Read our Declaration of Principles on the back page of this paper; earnestly consider them; join with us and help to establish them. Then will slave and master be abolished, and a real peace come, to all, including England's engineers.

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