

THE ENGINEERING LOCK-OUT.

By J. R. CAMPBELL.

At the moment of writing it seems as if the engineering lock-out was going to take place. There is, of course, still time for compromise, and there is no doubt that if the engineering employers would not be so cruel most of the officials would be glad to compromise. The cut is so drastic, however, that even the most fear-ridden soul crawling through life could not accept such a reduction without first offering resistance.

THE EMPLOYERS' CASE.

The reasons offered by the employers for making the reduction are now moth-eaten. They are the usual wail about the impoverishment of British industry and its inability to pay the workers such high wages. In every tragedy there is an element of comedy, and the comedy during those days of hardship and struggle is supplied by the employing class pleading poverty while still maintaining their luxurious standard of life. The shops which cater for the fashionable classes in our large towns are still doing a roaring trade, and yet over it all the wail of the employing class is heard: "We are being ruined by the high wages of the extravagant workmen's class." The whole thing reminds the writer of a play which he saw when he was a boy. The heroine was supposed to be a poor starving girl who had been deeply wronged by a wicked world. The lady who played the part was taken ill, and the part was played by her understudy, a lady who was fat and forty, and whose fingers were covered with flash jewellery. Naturally there was more laughter than tears at this particular performance, and a similar reception is all that the performance of the engineering employers deserve.

After all there are ample indications that the poverty-stricken attitude of the employers is only a colossal joke. There is an institution in our large commercial centres known as the Stock Exchange. It is primarily an institution for regulating the flow of capital between various industries and firms, and as such affords a register of the standing of any industry or firm. It is also, of course, a gilded gambling den, where mugs are fleeced, but it is its first aspect we are concerned with here. If the prospects of the industry were as desperate as the employers have painted, then the shares of the engineering industry in the Stock Exchange would have the value of toilet paper. What do we find?

Let us take that home of bankrupt grocer and busted bookmaker and other wage slaves who have served an apprenticeship, and are therefore fond of thinking that they are above the first mentioned species—Babcocks & Wilcox, Renfrew. We find Babcock's £1 share selling in April at £2 5s. 7½d. per share, which does not suggest bankruptcy. Then there is the Rolls Royce Co., which must have sold a few motor cars to the South Wales miners, for we find their £1 share standing at £1 4s. 4½d.

Then there is the pride of Manchester, Mathers and Platt, who have thoroughly "Americanised" their establishment, and whose £1 share can be had by any member of the unemployed for thirty shillings. After them we have that highly philanthropic firm, Stewart & Lloyds, whose munificence in providing the workers in Glasgow and other places with employment will surely be rewarded hereafter. You can get their £10 share for £13 2s. 6d., but as it will probably be a long lock-out, it is hardly advisable for engineering workers to spend all their lock-out pay in going for those shares. Next comes poor John Brown and Co., who unfortunately have not been getting as much profit from their slaves as they might, even if the Prince of Wales did step in and assist production for a few minutes a month or so back. John's shares can be had for 19/4. Still the workers in Browns have been had for much more than that in the past. We have not seen any recent quotations of the shares of "Wulley Beardmore's" establishment, but we understand

that the rumour current in Dalmuir that he is selling the whole concern with his title thrown in is a trifle premature.

In view of those facts we fear that we must be cynical enough to doubt that our dearly beloved bosses are telling the truth.

We have never been able to discover why the boss class imagine that the statement of the fact that industry is too poor to pay a living wage in any way helps them. They seem to imagine that this is their most telling argument. All that they seem to think is necessary is to make this assertion with owl-like solemnity and the wicked agitator crumbles up completely. As a matter of fact the opposite is the case. If it were true that industry is too poor to support in comfort and decency those who do the necessary work, then it is much too poor to support those who do nothing at all. The more desperate the bosses can make the plight of industry appear, the more urgent becomes the necessity of getting rid of them.

THE VALUE OF POWER.

It is necessary to stress the fact, however, that as society is constituted to-day victory goes not to the side having the most logical arguments or boasting of its high ideals, but to the side having the greatest strength. In this lock-out only one of the combatants has anything approaching morality and decency on its side. The engineering and foundry workers are fighting to give their homes a reasonable security, to secure that the burdens borne by their womenfolk shall not be rendered unbearable; they are fighting to ensure that their children shall not be stunted by under-nourishment, and that they themselves shall not be treated like cattle. But all those high motives will be of no avail unless they can develop a greater solidarity and resistance to the employers. To-day, as in the past, the race is to the swift and the battle to the strong. Only to-day it is not the strength of the individual but the strength of the organisation to which he is attached that counts. Here in the engineering and shipbuilding group we have a series of trades so closely related to each other that you have virtually one unit. The employers throughout the group are so closely linked up in inter-locking directorates, federations, etc., that they have an effective solidarity.

The workers, on the other hand, are hopelessly divided into competing unions, and if there is greater solidarity in this lock-out than there has been in industrial struggles in the past, it is due to the employers locking a number of unions out at the same time, not due to any sudden accession of wisdom to the unions themselves.

Let us look at the tragic situation that has been revealed in Engineering and Shipbuilding in the last few months. Last November the ship joiners were locked out. The other workers went to their work as usual, and thanked God that they were not joiners. Some weeks after, having helped the boss to complete his ships, except for joiner work, they took collection sheets round the yards on behalf of the joiners. Which reminds us of the chap that was going home one night when he came upon a burly ruffian sitting on the chest of a peaceful citizen, and amusing himself by battering the citizen's brains out with a bottle. The wayfarer went up and tapped the ruffian on the shoulder: "What the 'ell do you want?" asked the ruffian. "Excuse me interrupting you," said the wayfarer, "but would you mind if I administered a headache tablet to that gentleman?" A truly ludicrous feature of the situation was that when the bosses sent ships across to Germany for completion, some of the "Huns" refused to work them, but the patriotic Britishers—who are of course not Huns but sane trade unionists—continued to troop into the shipyards and help the boss to beat their own fellow-worker.

Well, take a nibble of the shipyard workers, and if they agree, we'll keep the shipyards going and draw our profits while we take a somewhat bigger bite at the Engineering workers. When

they are beaten we'll come back and take another nibble at the shipbuilding workers."

The scheme worked out to perfection. The shipyard workers thanked God that they had such merciful bosses. And the Engineering foundry workers are left to face the bosses alone—that is, if the bosses don't relent and agree to take smaller bites spread over a longer period instead of the big bites they propose taking now.

THE CURSE OF SECTIONALISM.

The whole development shows what a curse sectionalism unionism in an industry can be.

The greatest crime that a man can commit against the working class to-day is that of keeping it to its old methods. The movement must change or perish. The initiative in smashing sectionalism must come from the rank and file. If things in the union organisation of the industry are in an unholy mess only the rank and file can clear it up. The Workers' Committee movement has definite proposals in this direction. They desire to see workshop committees or groups formed of active men who will associate together to formulate the structure of a unified organisation for the industry. They will then, through their branch groups, seek through revision of rules to impose such a policy on the official unions. All the time the workshop and union groups will be a rallying point for the workers in a time of crisis.

IF THE LOCK-OUT TAKES PLACE.

If the lock-out takes place then the machinery for joint resistance must be set up. Local and district joint committees of the locked-out workers should be formed. In places where they are adjacent to a mining area steps should be taken to get into touch with the miners with a view to organising mass demonstrations and engaging in any other activity that circumstances may make necessary. The experience of the miners in communal kitchens might be useful, as would perhaps be the joint buying of the food-stuffs by the organisations. Close touch should be maintained with the unemployed organisations, who could co-operate like the miners, and could help to keep a close watch on blacklegs. The active men should form into definite groups in each district, should try to get on to the strike committees, and should in every possible way try to give direction to the fight and prevent a weak-kneed climbing down. The lessons of the lock-out should be hammered home relentlessly. The great tragedy of most strikes and lock-outs is not the hardship that is endured, the chances that are lost, the betrayals that result; the great tragedy is that men should experience suffering and learn nothing from it. When workers are engaged in an industrial struggle they are vividly interested in their own welfare. They see the defects of their organisation more clearly, but when the struggle is over they drift back to their old ways, and the defective organisation remains in being to the next crisis. It should surely be evident that if it is good enough for four organisations to be standing together in the struggle, then when it is over the four organisations should be combined and a more powerful organisation developed. The lock-out should be prolonged as long as possible. Every week that passes more organisations are being thrown into the fight. In August it may be the railwaymen's turn. The larger grows the number of striking locked-out, and unemployed workers the more necessary it becomes to link them up together and develop a general control of the movement locally and nationally. When they become sufficiently organised, then the call should go forth to industries which are working, but which are threatened with wage reductions. STOP THEM ALL, and do not start them unless the boss climbs down, or unless circumstances are favourable for starting them under the control of the strike committees. We must be loyal, my friends. By Heavens, we must be loyal, but loyal to our self-preserving instincts, loyal to our families, loyal to our class. How pathetically silly are those people who expect the worker to neglect his home, neglect his children, besmirch his manhood, in order to be loyal to the institutions of the boss class. Away with such loyalties. Our loyalty is to the working class first, last, and all the time.