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The Policy of the Engineers

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tection to the operatives, as is found, for instance, in the Building Trades, from any fixity in their products ; nor is there any monopoly of skill, perhaps even no supremacy of technical aptitude, possessed by the workmen of this country. As in the Cotton Trade so in the Engineering, it has to be recognized that in order to maintain its national position, an international relationship in the conditions of working has to be maintained, and the practical admission of this fact will do much to remove a restraining incubus. It will tend, even though it will inevitably bring hardship on individual men, to increase the total volume of employment in the country ; and it will probably do much to facilitate the introduction of that shorter working day to secure which the dispute began. The employers met the claim for a shorter day by saying it would be followed by diminished output and increased expense, but if the efficiency of production can be increased, then the way is best prepared for that reduction of hours which is desired.

ERNEST AVES

THE POLICY OF THE ENGINEERS.

THE following is a provincial view of the engineers' policy in the recent dispute. The masters have fought far more against interferences in regard to machinery and the claim of trade unionist officials to "boss" their workshops than against the demand for an eight hours' day. Take a case in Leeds. A firm had two lathes which one good man at 35s. a week was perfectly capable of managing by himself. Possibly a boy only was needed. The trades union official, however, interfered, and insisted that there must be two men at the job, each of whom would be paid, say 28s. a week. Another case, which also comes from a non-interested and quite trustworthy source, is equally instructive. A man had a machine to look after which frequently did not need watching for half an hour at a time. During one of these intervals he began sharpening his tools. The foreman came up and told him to put them away. "Why?" "Because this is your own time, and you must sharpen tools in your employer's time." The further development of a system of this sort would of course be ruinous, and one cannot wonder that the masters were alarmed at what seemed to be only the beginning of a new policy.

These recent developments are due to the success of the Independent Labour Party in this particular society ; but there is always sure to be *some* discouragement to good workmen, for the trade union must be ruled by a majority, that is by a mediocrity which refuses to allow the best workmen to receive the reward of superiority. Then there are the secretaries. A great deal of unnecessary meddling is done by paid officials, who think that they ought to show something for their money. So they fuss about in their district and bully small employers. The local branch of the trade

union, and consequently the local policy, is apt to be "bossed" by its own paid secretary, just as a municipality is often controlled and directed by the Town Clerk, who is before the law a paid servant, dismissable at any time by a vote of the Council. The policy of restricting the number of machines which a man may look after might no doubt be defended, if applied in moderation, upon the ground that the mental and physical strain would in the long run be dangerous to health; but unfortunately these restrictions are usually defended by "new" unionists on the fallacious principle that you can increase work, and improve trade from a workman's point of view, by reducing the output. "Lower the productive capacity of labour in order to absorb the unemployed!" is the socialistic idea: and it was a trade unionist of that type who told the Labour Commission that if after the adoption of an eight hours' day there then arose a fresh lot of unemployed, the remedy would be to reduce the day's work to six hours, and if that failed to four. And yet in the same breath these dishonest advocates will tell the public that the same amount of work will be produced in an eight hours' day as in a nine. Either of these opinions *may* be correct, but not both. But the restriction of output, which some try to effect by reducing hours, others aim at by more direct means. Thus the Shoemakers' Union ordered the reduction from eleven dozen pairs to a little over nine dozen pairs of the weekly work to be done by a set of men working certain machines.¹

It was stated by Mr. Sidney Webb in November, at the London School of Economics and Political Science,² that the unions are not opposed to the introduction of labour-saving machinery. This may be true in the main, but the conditions of introduction are often so severe that they practically become prohibitive; for it is not worth while for an employer to introduce labour-saving machinery if the machinery is to be "throttled." Moreover, some unions have been almost, if not quite, "captured" by the Independent Labour Party. Mr. Barnes, for example, who was elected secretary of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, is a declared Socialist, and has given himself up not only to abstract aspirations for a future millennium, but also to the advocacy of the policy involved in the special economic fallacy which we have been discussing. Just about the time of Mr. Webb's lecture an editorial appeared in the monthly journal of the Engineers' Union, which contained the words, "labour-displacing machinery means an ever increasing obstacle to be faced." This monthly journal has proudly enumerated many instances of restrictive policy carried out by administration and legislation (Trade Union bye-law). The "demarcation" of work in order to secure unskilled jobs for skilled workmen, at skilled wages, is one of the commonest methods of attaining the end. No doubt many of the regulations do good; no

¹ *Engineering*, October 29th, 1897.

² In the course of an interesting lecture on "The Policy of Trade Unions with regard to New Processes and Machinery."

doubt many of the employers need carefully watching; but that must not prevent us from recognising that the employers have many real grievances, and that trade unionism is doing some harm as well as a great deal of good. Any one can make a rough estimate for himself. I am very far from wishing to overstate the case against the Amalgamated Society of Engineers. Its peculiar¹ constitution subjects its policy and practice to innumerable local variations; and it is certainly true that organised efforts to restrict output have been more serious in some districts than in others.

Nevertheless, so far as the north of England is concerned, I have been reluctantly led by a good deal of independent and perfectly impartial enquiry to the conclusion that the official denials which came from London on this question of the restriction of output are almost worthless. The policy of the Amalgamated Society is the policy of its branches, and at each local branch the idea of increasing employment by restricting output has prevailed to a greater or less extent. Many extraordinary instances have been given by anonymous writers, or accumulated by the Masters' Federation, of the process which is called "throttling the machinery." Let me give another instance, for the accuracy of which I can vouch. A large firm in Leeds purchased four machines (American patents) for sawing steel bars, and turning them into nuts. Their management required no skill, and a boy at fifteen shillings a week was given charge of them. The union interfered, and insisted that the principle of "one man one machine" should be applied. The firm gave way, and just before the lock-out four skilled men were being paid seven pounds a week in wages for doing the work of one unskilled boy. At the beginning of the lock-out the boy was set to work again. Whether the strain is too much for a boy I cannot say. Certainly the work is neither skilled nor heavy. The most general and elaborate mode of wasting the employer's time has been in the sharpening of tools (cf. p. 124), but this ought to have been avoided long ago by the universal adoption of the American system of a separate tool-sharpening department. When the managers are tactful and efficient there is less cause of complaint against the men.

But there is no doubt that there has been a marked change for the worse in the spirit and conduct of the engineers since the election of Mr. Barnes as secretary. Take the quantitative test:—A North-Eastern firm has worked out the time occupied by mechanics employed in 1897 and 1896 respectively on various parts of two marine engines. Precisely the same patterns and drawings were used, yet the result is the discovery that in 1897, when the "new unionist" policy became general, it took 3,014 hours more work to achieve an exactly similar result to that attained in 1896. Another comparison instituted at Oldham is worth recording:—On a machine completed just before the strike, 719½ hours were booked to

¹ Cf. *Industrial Democracy*. Webb, Vol. I, pp. 94, 95, &c.

society men at a wage cost of £17 3s. 4d. On an exactly similar machine since the strike, built by non-union men and apprentices—equally good work—only 494 hours were booked, at a wage cost of £10 0s. 11d.; saving in hours $225\frac{1}{2}$, in cost 41·5 per cent. It is, however, obviously unfair to compare the wages of engineers with apprentices; but undoubtedly almost every firm which has locked out its men has made some startling discoveries. Now that work is resumed great economies in production may be expected to result from the experiments which have been made during the six months of enforced idleness. Of course a long-headed employer knows the immense advantage of a trades union—if only it is wisely conducted—in the saving of friction. A standard rate is an indispensable convenience, and the wise manager accepts it, seeing that mediocrity will always tend to set the standard of remuneration. There will always be in an organised industry workmen who are being underpaid, and others who are being overpaid. And especially must this be the case in the engineering trade, where the “jobs” differ so much, and are constantly varying. The standard rate is based on utility rather than justice. It is the custom with many firms to send substantial cheques at Christmas to the best workmen, whose superiority they are not allowed to acknowledge publicly. But every kind of union, whether political or industrial, involves a certain amount of tyranny and injustice. It cannot be doubted that the organisers of the Employers’ Federation have exercised pressure of the most extraordinary kind upon employers who did not wish to join them, and had no complaints against their workpeople. The Federation has compelled tactful employers to sacrifice themselves to the non-tactful; and it may be expected that some of the small firms which have been forced into the lock-out will be ruined. The extent of the losses caused by the strike to the British nation can never be accurately gauged. But they must have been immense. Nevertheless I have heard the opinion freely expressed, and I share it myself, that the educational value of this practical lesson in economics will in the end compensate workmen and employers in England for the losses that have been inflicted and the sacrifices that have been endured.

F. W. HIRST

TAXATION OF THE CLERGY.

THERE is a wide-spread belief among the beneficed clergy in England and Wales that they bear more than their fair share of Imperial and local taxation. To state the grounds of this belief, as well as to ascertain the approximate extent of the alleged unfairness, is the object of this paper.

For the sake of clearness I must here enumerate the sources from some or all of which the beneficed clergyman derives his income.