

# Should Professional Engineers Organize Union?

The Affirmative and Negative Sides of a Debate Held by the Toronto Branch  
of the Engineering Institute of Canada

## Yes—

declares WILLIAM SNAITH

ACCORDING to the new dictionary of the English language, a union is a combination of co-laborers for the joint and mutual protection of their specific trade; unionism is the principle of combining for unity of purpose and action; a labor union is an association of wage workers in a trade for advancing their mutual interests; a trade union is an organized association of workmen skilled in any trade or industrial occupation, formed for the protection and promotion of their common interests, especially the increase of wages, better conditions, shorter hours of labor, mutual insurance, etc.

An engineer is defined in the Century dictionary as one versed in any branch of engineering; one who runs or manages an engine. Engineering is there defined as the science and art of making, building or using engines and machines, or of designing and constructing public works or the like, requiring special knowledge of materials, machinery and the laws of mechanics.

These definitions are more or less general and it would not be too much to say that the Engineering Institute of Canada is a union within the definition of a union as a combination of co-laborers for the joint and mutual protection of their specific trade, if we concede that trade is not very much different from profession.

Unionization, I do not doubt, conveys to your minds, as it does to mine, a more definite idea than the general one I have mentioned, and for the purposes of this discussion I think we shall agree that we mean what a labor leader would understand by unionization—i.e., a union of engineers for the joint and mutual protection of their profession and the promotion of their common interests, especially the increase of salaries and bettering of conditions; and to make the case

*"Unionization is advisable, practical and necessary."*

*"It is founded on correct principles.—If we do not hang together we will hang separately."*

*"Salaries can be raised by unionization.—Engineering salaries are lower than those in a number of trades."*

*"There is a stirring in the dry bones of the national engineering societies, but I cannot say that I think anything will be done."*

WILLIAM SNAITH.

more clear-cut, let us include the right of engineers to use unionism's final weapon in the securing of its demands,—the right to strike.

### Introduction

Having cleared the way by the definitions, my proposition is to prove that the engineering profession should be unionized, and I should like to do this under three headings: (1) That it is advisable; (2) that it is practical; and (3) that it is necessary.

Unionization is advisable in the first place because it binds together by strong ties, such as self-interest, co-op-

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## No—

says Prof. PETER GILLESPIE

TO those whose interests are more or less identical, the value of having some form of organization for mutual advantage and for collective and individual protection, is generally conceded. The slogan, "Each for all and all for each," has exerted a powerful influence on men from the earliest times; moreover, this disposition is entirely defensible and worthy of the support and encouragement of fair-minded men.

Workmen have formed trade unions,—local, national and international. Experience has taught them that while the

*"It would be impossible to get more than half the engineers to support unionization."*

*"By unionizing, engineers would prostitute an ancient, honorable and respected calling to the level of a trade."*

*"To unionize would be to declare that we possess nothing distinctive in education . . . or capacity."*

*"Legislation will secure everything that unionization could."*

PROF. PETER GILLESPIE.

voice of a single worker is seldom heard in the din of modern industrialism, the united demand of a thousand is accorded a respectful hearing; hence the attempt on the part of labor to lay down the conditions under which its members may be employed, its attempts to stipulate the minimum wage which its employer must pay; its efforts to fix the number of hours that shall constitute a day's work, and finally its refusal (often successfully enforced) to work with men not of their affiliation or to handle goods or material produced by workmen not similarly unionized.

### Desire to Improve Solidarity

This last attempt at control is an illustration of the desire of labor to improve its solidarity and to extend its power through the organization of national bodies where craft distinctions are not recognized. These are attempts to unite all workmen, irrespective of occupation, under one banner so strong, so thoroughly loyal and so alert to the interests of its members, that no employer or group of employers will be able to refuse its demands or successfully oppose it. To enforce its demands it has recourse to the strike, local, general and sympathetic. Men who have no grievance themselves are sometimes called out in order that the members of another craft in another locality may be assisted in securing whatever concessions they may require.

There are also associations of manufacturers, employers' associations, councils for industrial defense and what not, the objects of which are to resist what are thought to be the unreasonable demands of the labor unions and to defend themselves against their untrustworthiness and legal irresponsibility. These have advocated the placing of full legal accountability upon labor unions so that duties and responsibilities as between employers and workers might be reciprocal and equal. Generally they have been opposed to strikes and lockouts and in favor of an amicable and equitable ad-