

The Canadian Engineer

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Report Presented by Status Committee to J.C.T.O.

Complete Text of Draft Bills Formulated for Joint Committee of Technical Organizations by Its Status Committee (H. G. Acres, Chairman) as Model Legislation for Uniform Provincial Acts—Report of Status Committee, Introductory to Draft Bills, Discussing Need for Legislation

THE phrase, "Status of the Engineer," may be roughly defined as the reputation and degree of prestige which the engineer enjoys or deserves in the eyes of his fellow-citizens, having due regard to the value of his services to the public at large.

Status involves two essential factors: First, recognition of engineering as an essential profession, through the agency of both public sentiment and legal enactment; and, second, an adequate scale of remuneration for services, as compared with other professions and with trades.

These two factors may be shortly defined as "recognition" and "remuneration."

In handling the above two phases of this problem it is necessary to determine whether they are of equal importance, or whether one takes precedence over the other, and, finally, if the latter is the case, to fix the order of precedence.

The argument under this head can be conveniently established by analogy. From the bald standpoint of remuneration, engineering service is just as properly a commodity as manual labor, and the revenue derived from its sale is governed first by the number of purchasers who need it, or think they need it, and second, by the amount of such commodity the individual purchaser can be prevailed upon to absorb in place of some other commodity which he has used previously in place of it. There is no virgin market for engineering services. It must compete in long-established markets with other commodities which it must supplement or displace.

The organization of the trade union was essentially an expedient to advertise the worth and importance of a commodity which, for lack of a better term, may be called "manual labor." The unity of interest created by such organizations enabled the manual worker to make use of the strike as an additional advertising expedient, and as a result of the forced recognition thereby realized, he was able to demand a higher price for the commodity he produced, and by the sale of which he existed.

Commodity Must Be Recognized

There was no virgin market for shredded wheat. A carefully planned and extensive advertising campaign was instituted to prevail upon the public to eat shredded wheat instead of oatmeal porridge. Through this expedient recognition of shredded wheat was grafted on the public mind. It was educated to think it needed shredded wheat, and thereafter remuneration accrued to the Shredded Wheat Co., with resulting prosperity.

Whether the commodity is "manual labor" or whether it is "shredded wheat," it must be recognized before it can be sold. The greater the public need, whether fundamental, as in the case of manual labor, or cultivated, as in the case of shredded wheat, the greater and more certain will be the remuneration.

Considered from the non-aesthetic standpoint as a commodity, engineering service must conform to the same economic laws, and recognition must of necessity be the precursor of remuneration. This proposition would seem to be amply vindicated by the fact that it applies to any individual consultant who has a large clientele, and who can demand a large fee for his services. Almost invariably it will be found that such a man has demanded a higher price for his services as their value became more fully recognized and established. He first obtained recognition through the medium of some form of advertising, which educated an ever-increasing body of the public to need him, or think they needed him, and remuneration followed as a matter of course.

Recognition Precedes Remuneration

The problem of establishing the status of the engineer therefore resolves itself essentially into devising some means of applying to engineers as a class the laws which have operated successfully in the case of the engineer as an individual. In other words, engineering service generally must have recognition commensurate with its value to the community at large before adequate remuneration can be obtained for engineers as a class.

If, therefore, the engineer is to take the place in the community to which he is entitled by virtue of his attainments and the high class of service he can render, the primary requirement is recognition.

Recognition is obtainable by two general methods, more or less distinct—namely, by general publicity and by legislation.

The ordinary means of obtaining publicity for the engineering profession are many and diverse. The outstanding requirement under this head is for engineers as a class to participate in the affairs of national and provincial government. This contention is so fundamentally sound and has been so often repeated, and so generally recognized, that it is not necessary to enlarge upon it. It is true beyond the possibility of argument that the status of the engineer as related to national affairs cannot be advanced or conserved unless engineers themselves exercise active governmental functions, and pass, as well as frame, the laws relating to or incidentally affecting the profession. The civil service bill now before the Dominion house is a luminous exemplification of this condition. This bill is of vital importance as related to the status of engineers as a class. It seeks to give engineers in the civil service a professional status as distinguished from the status of the ordinary departmental clerk, and also to establish an advanced salary scale. It has been framed with the assistance of engineers, but it is fairly safe to say that there is not a single practising engineer in the House of Commons to argue and support the passing of this bill. Its very doubtful fate rests mainly in the hands