Do Strikes Pay?

By the RT. HON. J. H. THOMAS, M.P. *Colonial Secretary in the late Labour Administration)

When we face the question of labour troubles and disputes and the "way out" one is inclined to say, nessimistically, because of much past experience, that there is none! That disputes have always arisen and will continue to arise, and that, as long as human nature remains what it is, men will continue to fight each other, whether on the battlefield, with gun, bayonet and bomb, or, on the world-wide field of labour, with strike and lockout-the weapons respectively of worker and employer.

We should all be perfectly agreed, nevertheless, that one very definite road to renewed prosperity, to financial recuperation, to economic soundness, is that every man should put his heart into his daily work, whether he be master or labourer, organiser, mechanic, manager, scientific investigator, inventor, miner, railwayman, br any other of the thousand and one of those who work with hand and brain. That, of course, goes without saying. It is my creed: it is your creed: and the man who does not believe it, theoretically, as the only plain way of duty, is a bad citizen, and ought not to be supported.

But when it comes to the actualities of life such a platitude as this often breaks down because its antecedent condition of smooth working is a satisfied populace, who feel that they are getting a fair share of the ordinary amenities of life. In the past, manhood, womanhood, and even childhood were exploited. The trade unions arose to fight these conditions, and many of the rules and regulations which are criticised to-day were originally framed as very necessary measures of defence against tyranny and injustice. No one who studies our industrial history can for a moment doubt this. The worker has had to fight for what he has got.

The fight has been against low wages, miserable and insanitary conditions of life both at home and at work, the repression of liberty, and many other things of a like nature. Much has been accomplished. On the whole the workers have had good sucapss; but it has almost always been Diccess on the battlefield, and with-But the clash of battle little has ever Deen conceded.

This, I think, has been the tremendous mistake. What might have been conceded to the sense of justice and fairness has needed, instead, to be wrung by force from unwilling hands. Here, too, is the secret of the difficulty which always faces the labour-leader when he advocates conciliatory methods. What is the reply he gets? "We tried negotiation last time. We were met with a blank refusal. Concessions were out of the question. Give and take was not a matter of discussion-it was all take. Then we went out on strike. tions was conceded to war."

Unfortunately, this is a statement of fact and not fancy. Nevertheless, any reasonable thinker will admit that it is madness to concede to force what is denied to reason and I personally have had a hand in hundreds of disputes which have so resulted.

As a rule strikes, like fires, arise from little things, like the careless dropping of a match of tactlessness amongst the inflammable matter which is always lying around; and at this stage in the evolutionary process of society, when it is hopeless to expect the working man to return to the hard conditions from which he has emerged, there is a fierce determination to hold the ground gained. Thus, when the workers hear the sort of hectoring speech which their fathers were accustomed to still tactlessly indulged in, it is a matter for little wonder that they should harden their hearts and refuse even to listen to more reasonable counsels.

To an amazing extent conciliation is dependent on the right atmosphere. The Lancashire spinner will tell you that, when the east wind blows, his work is doubled. It sucks all the moisture out of the air: this in turn sucks all the moisture out of his varn-and the breaking point is reached much more easily and quickly than when the south wind, with its moisture-laden breath, keeps the yarn intact.

It is not otherwise in industrial negotiations, from which the public often expect so much. The atmosphere needs to be right-and quite frequently it is far from being right. There are faults on both sides, as in all human affairs, but the wrongs have been the workers', and until those wrong are put right, and put right from a sheer sense of the justice of the case, it will continue to be a hopeless matter to expect that we have seen the last strike-any more than the last war although both are "consummations devoutly to be wished."

We may take it for granted that the man who talks about legislation making strikes illegal is a fit subject for a mental specialist. The first effect of such madness would be a universal ctrike to teach legislators the limits of their powers, and the foolishness of supposing that Parliament can name the date of the beginning of the millennium. We must look deeper than this type of talker is capable of look-

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crude method of revolution. cure is a thousand times wor ion we want. The one makes d out or order, the other makes of out of chaos. I was at Lord's or watching a cricket match. Ther one batsman who was a mighty er and he hit a six-but the nex owled him. There was anothe who was a bit too slow for the natience of the crowd, who results, somethink quick, a bit excitement to stir their blood. mind this he was the chap who.

Hamlet" generally. Personally,

persuaded that we have outgrou

the match. This much is certain; there turning back. What we have we s the motto of the workers, and for masters and the State to suff selves to the changed conditions I take a house at a higher rental cause of an increasing family, must so arrange my other expe ture that my assets may not be p manently lessened. Are employ and the Legislature of this coun taking that course to-day? If the are, there are few signs of it.

Only recently we have been told a good authority, that with better ganization and management and ed omics, costings in industry might reduced by at least a third. I has frequently pointed out how dilaton the State has been in those great electrical and coal-conversion schem which have been so long foreshado ed, and are backed by the best exper opinion. The masters must begin cut their coats according to the clot The day of low wages is over. The when big profits were made at the pense of the well-being of the wo ers is over also. Those days car

return. It behoves employers to their house in order, to take mean -as some have already done w great success-to see if there are ways and means of making the hes both worlds-the workers' world the employers' world. It is this earnest spirit of con

tion which will breed the confi which is the first requisite of p in industry. Lack of confidence een the bane of all conferences tween masters and men. I have so it a thousand times. It stands like high wall of partition which often seems unscalable. But, instead of garding each other as enemies, we must all, whilst defending our o case whole-heartedly, be at the same time ready to understand the view. the other side; to put ourselves in th other man's shoes, and feel who they pinch. That is, in my judgme the best way to avert strikes; the only oad to industrial peace.

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ee us to-day about a good tonic. "Come Here and be Pleased." McMURDO'S DRUG STORE, Phone 277. Vater St.

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