

# Editorial

## EMPLOYMENT OF ALIEN ENGINEERS.

Basing their case upon the appointment of Prof. G. F. Swain as consulting engineer to the Railway Board of Inquiry, the council of the Canadian Society of Civil Engineers has protested to the Government against the appointment of alien engineers. The text of the protest was published in full in our last week's issue, together with a review, from a news standpoint, of Sir Henry Drayton's reply, of the board's scope, and of Prof. Swain's biography.

With the general principles involved in the protest, all Canadian engineers will agree most whole-heartedly, but it is unfortunate that the protest was not based upon a more flagrant case. There have been many previous appointments of American engineers for which there were no justifying circumstances such as exist regarding the Swain appointment. The statistics compiled by the engineer of the Railway Board of Inquiry must be absolutely divorced from local bias and self-interest, or else the report of the board, when based upon those statistics, will be worthless. We hold no brief for the board, but we can readily see numerous possible objections to the appointment of Canadian railway engineers for this particular work.

It would be unfortunate if the government of Canada, or of any province or municipality in Canada, were to lay down any hard and fast rule that would bar them from getting the best advice obtainable, especially in a case like this where the whole future of Canada and hundreds of millions of dollars are involved.

The Canadian engineering profession cannot afford to be too narrow in its views of such matters. It cannot adopt "closed shop" methods.

There is another side to the matter, however. While the employment of foreign specialists may be at times fully justified, there is no reason under the sun for Canadian cities, governments or individuals going abroad for engineers to design filtration plants, retaining walls, reservoirs, aqueducts, bridges, sewers, highways or other similar items in the usual run of engineering work, unless unusually special problems are involved which call for a knowledge of practice and experience in other countries. It would be unwise to burn our bridges behind us to such an extent that we could not employ a foreign specialist if the public were to need him, but, generally speaking, the Canadian engineer need take off his hat to no other country!

Our municipal engineers average a hundred percent higher in ability than do the usual political incumbents of such positions in the United States. Compare our consulting engineers as a class and as a whole with the average man in the United States who calls himself a consulting engineer (again noting that in this case, like in all others, there are many exceptions) and the comparison is not detrimental to the Canadians. In the hydro-electric field, Canadian engineers indisputably lead the world. In bridge building, road construction, railroad work and other engineering lines, the percentage of Canadian failures is, to say the least, no greater than those of other countries.

Our schools are well equipped, the raw material that they receive is equal to any, and if we haven't as many

world-renowned engineers as has the United States, it is merely because Canada is not so populous. Surely Canadian engineers should be allowed the full benefit of whatever field exists in this country for their activities, and should not be burdened with foreign competition any more than is really necessary.

Yet we should not wish to be unfair or unwise in our demands for legislation. It has been alleged by some that the alien labor law of the United States bars out Canadian engineers, and that our legislation should retaliate. A representative of *The Canadian Engineer* made a special trip to the United States this week to find out whether that is really the case. Consultation with corporation counsels, U.S. district attorneys, U.S. chief immigration inspectors, state engineers, municipal engineers and U.S. army engineers, shows that they do not interpret the alien labor law in such manner. One section of the U.S. law bars out foreign labor of all kinds, but a qualifying section makes exception of persons belonging to any regularly recognized learned profession. All authorities agreed that engineering is a learned profession, and that Canadian engineers or engineering contractors who are university graduates, or who are members of any recognized engineering society such as the Canadian Society of Civil Engineers, are at entire liberty to practise or transact business in the United States. Some few states have state laws, corresponding to our own Manitoba and Quebec Acts, that might interfere, but such laws are said to be exceptional.

It is not at all unprecedented for Canadian engineers to receive appointments or supervise work in the United States. As an instance, R. A. Ross, of Montreal, was employed by Judge Hammond, then corporation counsel of Buffalo, as an expert in a power and light rate investigation, and was so engaged for a considerable period, his fee being paid by the municipality.

But such instances are few and far between. They are negligible compared to the number of American engineers who have been retained by Canadians, yet they show that the U.S. alien labor law has not invited any legislative retaliation. The present administration at Washington may have very recently decided to interpret this law differently, and, if so, Canada would be justified in meeting the U.S. attitude should there be any clear evidence showing a change of policy.

Legislation is not needed; patriotism and self-interest alone should give the Canadian engineer a square deal at home. The government surely must recognize that! Yet, in this case, the appointment of Prof Swain seems more commendable than the appointment to the chair of the Railway Board of Inquiry of a man who controls important railroad interests in Canada, and who has affiliations and competitions that cannot but unconsciously color his viewpoint.

## REMOVAL FROM BRITISH BLACKLIST.

Announcement of the removal of the following Americans from Great Britain's trade blacklist was made in the London "Official Gazette" of September 8th: Electro-Bleaching Gas Co., of New York and Niagara