

## THE PAY OF THE ENGINEER\*

IN his presidential address at the last annual meeting of the Canadian Mining Institute, Arthur A. Cole commented on the meagre and altogether inadequate salaries which are offered, particularly by our government departments, to technical men; and in the course of a subsequent discussion, much was said about the necessity of adopting some means of generally improving the status of the profession. This should not end in mere talk. Mr. Cole pointed his remarks by citing a recent specific case, where the Civil Service Commission of Canada had advertised for a legal officer at an initial salary of \$3,300 per annum, and for a chemist in the Mines Branch at an initial salary of \$1,600 per annum. The advertisement detailed very fully the qualifications which were required of applicants for each position, and a comparison of these was justly summed up by Mr. Cole as follows: "The qualifications required by the chemist are such as would entitle him to a Ph.D. degree at any of the best universities on the continent. The absurdity of the discrimination thus instanced is further emphasized when we know that in the Mines Branch only the director receives a higher salary than that mentioned in the above advertisement as the amount to be paid at the start to the legal officer, whose duties could quite readily be performed by any mediocre country lawyer, or even by a clerk who had a few years' experience in a lawyer's office."

### Engineer, \$1,500; Camera Man, \$2,400

The contrast presented in these two advertisements is so pronounced that anyone not familiar with the real conditions might well be pardoned if they harbored the suspicion that Mr. Cole had deliberately selected some unusual isolated example to support his case. Unfortunately, it is only one instance of the invariable practice; it is typical of the government's estimation of the value of the services of a man with high technical training, and one has only to consult the advertisements of the Civil Service Commission, which appear from time to time in "The Canada Gazette," to appreciate the truth of this assertion. During the month of May, for example, a technical clerk was temporarily required in the Topographical Surveys Branch of the Department of the Interior at a salary at the rate of \$1,300 per annum, and it is stated that "applications will be considered from graduates in Applied Science, honor mathematics, or physics, of some recognized university." Qualified draughtsmen, competent to perform engineering and architectural work, are offered \$125 per month. By way of contrast, a "motion-picture camera man" required by the Department of Trade and Commerce is to be given an initial salary of \$2,400 per annum, and a law clerk an initial salary of \$2,100.

### Serious Reproach Against All Engineers

However, it is hardly necessary to multiply examples. The fact is self-evident that, as compared with other professions, the government sets a very low value on the services of men of the engineering profession, and the possibility for the existence of this state of affairs constitutes a serious reproach against all engineers. The training of a properly qualified technical man is a protracted and expensive business, necessitating as it does a long course of special study at a university or technical college, followed by a further period spent acquiring knowledge in the school of practical experience or in con-

ducting original research. Before he can attain proficiency such as is required of applicants for positions similar to those for which the Civil Service Commission offers a salary of from \$1,200 to \$1,600 per annum, the engineer must have spent some of the best years of his life and a very substantial sum of money acquiring the necessary knowledge. His knowledge has not been obtained at a lesser cost, either in time or money, than has that of the lawyer or doctor, and to be successful he must possess at least an equal measure of intelligence and ability. Why, then, is it that the lawyer and the doctor are everywhere remunerated at a fair cash value, while the engineer is expected to do work which calls for an equal degree of training, skill, intelligence, and efficiency, at a wage which would be refused with scorn by a mine mucker? Can it be that the salaries offered do actually represent the full worth of the engineer; or, if not, how does it come about that they are accepted, apparently with complete satisfaction? These questions need to be seriously considered and answered before there can be any improvement in the status of the technical man.

### The Doctors' and Lawyers' "Unions"

With regard to medicine and law, it is well to remind ourselves that those following these professions have certain natural advantages over members of the scientific and engineering professions. Everyone, at some time or another, has need of the services of a doctor, and in a lesser degree, the same may be said regarding the lawyer. Moreover, these professions do not, as a rule, necessitate extensive or frequent travelling from one part of the country to another. As a consequence, both doctors and lawyers are usually able to settle more or less permanently in one place, generally a large centre of population. They have better opportunities for meeting together, and one result of this is that both these professions are extremely well organized. It is true that there is no *actual* "union" of doctors or of lawyers, but it is none the less indisputable that there exists in each of these professions a very strict *latent* union. There is a well-maintained, if unwritten, etiquette, amounting practically to a taut agreement, whereby certain fees are charged for certain services, and the government or any corporation requiring the services of a doctor or lawyer is well aware that it would be useless to try and undercut these "union" wages. The wage they demand and receive serves to maintain the dignity of their professions, but, broadly speaking, it is not exorbitantly high.

### Remedy in Engineers' Own Hands?

If, then, the salaries paid to men of these professions are not excessive, why is it that the government is able to secure highly trained technical men for the wretched pittance offered by the Civil Service Commission? Mr. Cole calls it absurd discrimination, but is it absurd discrimination? Or have our technical men so much false modesty, or, rather, such a lack of self-respect and proper dignity, both for themselves and for their professions, that they themselves set this low value on their services? No doubt the great weight of opinion will endorse Mr. Cole's summing up, but is it quite fair for the technical men to blame the government for discriminating? Let them rather face the position squarely and honestly, and then place the blame where it rightly belongs. Is not the remedy entirely in their own hands?

After all, it is only human for an employer to get the best man he can at the lowest salary he will accept. This attitude may not be admirable, but it is, none the less, practically universal, and will remain so long as the ex-

\*From Bulletin of the Canadian Mining Institute, July, 1918.