

Ten Minutes' Talk With the Workers

Foreign Competition.

NO doubt it is "like carrying coals to Newcastle" to remind you that you are only allowed to work when it is profitable for your employer to permit you to do so and that so soon as he ceases to make a profit, or not as large a profit as he expected, out you go on the street in search of another "boss."

But while you instinctively know that, and certainly don't like it, if you paid more attention to economics—that study which deals with the manner in which wealth is produced and distributed—many of the difficulties that beset your paths today could be overcome or at least explained.

As you may have observed—at least it is to be hoped you have—there is a complete failure on the part of our politicians and "industrial captains" to make good their pledges about reconstruction. Nearly a twelve-month has elapsed since the first blast of the peace-trumpet was heard, yet there is no indication of that unbounded prosperity which was promised would accrue from the rebuilding of Belgium, France and the other devastated regions of the war; in fact, there is nothing but industrial chaos at present, and no prospect of anything else for the immediate future.

A Decoy-duck.

Of course, your good sense will teach you to laugh at the frantic efforts of the press to try and put the blame on our chaps who work in the mines, railways and elsewhere, and who are manly enough to resist being reduced to the coolie stage. I refer, of course, to the silly talk of German gold and "Red agitators,"—Bolsheviks they call us, with the suggestion that the term means the same as "Hun." This cry of "Bolshevik" at present is akin to the decoy-duck which is used by those who go duck-hunting—i.e., it is a deception to divert your attention away from the things that matter.

A more sinister excuse, however, which is offered, and one not so highly colored, though just as false, is to be found in the present talk about Foreign Competition. They used to tell us our natural enemy was the German; now the song has changed to Yankee competition. The same tale is now being told about the Yankee worker as was told about the German, viz. an infinite capacity for hard work, increasing output, and, above all, allegiance (another name for docility) to the American boss. The worker in America is now being applauded to the sky and offered as an example for you and I to follow; otherwise we in this country shall all go to the "dogs."

An Effect or a Cause?

Certainly the question of "foreign competition" can not be ignored, but what you would do well to consider for a moment is whether foreign competition is not more an effect than a cause when considering the present state of industrial and commercial anarchy.

Previous to 1914, the capitalists of Great Britain held a very strong position in the markets of the world. They were the premier exporters. It was reckoned that exports from this country were greater by far than any other country in the world, and were made up in the main of manufactured goods to the value of some 600 million pounds.

From these exports there came back, in addition to the interest from capital invested abroad, imports to the value of nearly 800 million pounds in the shape of all kinds of food, raw materials, such as oil, cotton, timber, etc., and the many things needed for manufacture.

But, thanks to the war, conditions have somewhat altered. It is said that foreign investments have been realized to such an extent that from the balance being against the capitalists of America the scales are tipped the other way, and are now in their favor, so far as relations with the capitalists of this country are concerned. Not

only so, but the Yankees are now exporting into Europe upon a scale undreamt of before the war. This, in addition to the efforts of the capitalists in other countries, to get rid of their exports, has raised the question of foreign competition, and brought it to the front.

Its Basis.

Now when you recollect the tremendous changes that were made in the workshop practice of this country during the war, the enormous amount of machinery, etc., that was introduced (practically revolutionizing industry,) and consider that other countries were doing the same, you can have some faint idea of what is really at the bottom of all the immediate trouble. You can see at a glance the forces that underlie the immediate situation, and why our great "captains" of industry are unable to lead us out of the morass. It is because the capitalists of all countries not only have exhausted their home markets but have each a surplus for world consumption.

When, of course, we talk of the home markets being exhausted it must not be assumed that we are all in affluence and comfort. It simply means that, thanks to our perverted system of producing for profit, there are no customers to be found, and so production is held up. That is why eyes are turned abroad for contracts and orders.

You may have often been puzzled, when reading in your newspaper about "our" exports and imports going up and down, and wondered what it all meant. Your common "horse-sense" teaches you that commodities don't come of themselves to this country from the other end of the globe. Nor are goods sent out from this country to other countries except with a purpose.

In Quest of Cheapness.

Obviously, if commodities can be produced cheaper in America, Japan or elsewhere they will cut out all others from the markets. The most recent illustration of this, and how cheapness is the god of capital and no respecter of countries, was the placing the other day by the Birmingham Corporation of a contract for 1000 tons of steel rails in America. A similar case happened in Glasgow a few weeks ago. This search for cheapness is undoubtedly one of the potent causes of international trade from which we get our terms "exports and imports."

These trade returns, then, classed under the heading of "exports and imports," simply represent the sum of the trading business of capitalists as individuals or companies.

Here you would do well to put on your thinking cap and hold it tight.

When our employers talk about "industrial efficiency" you must not imagine they are animated by disinterested motives, so far as your welfare is concerned. And if he boosts the Yankee worker for his patriotism, how he never works on the "ca-canny" principle, and all the rest of it, you can bet your boots "Mr. Employer" has some fish to fry.

When, however, he is unable to dupe you and I by such soft words as he frequently uses—nay, even while he uses them—he schemes and plans to gain his ends by other means. He becomes interested, for instance, in technical education; in welfare work; in Whitley Committees; sane Trade Unionism, and all the devices he can think of, to reduce to a minimum the unit-cost of production. All these things he will plead are in the national interest. It is but the old game of playing upon your credulity and getting you to do a bit more for the same wage.

But supposing, as workers, we took our master's advice and "did our damndest," worked until our finger-nails came off, so to speak; allowed unlimited machinery to be introduced; worked all the hours God sends; gave free scope for non-unionists, and as a result we cut the Yankees or the Japs out. What would it all mean

to us? What would be the net result for you and I? It would simply mean that, thanks to our precious system of profit-making, after a brief period of prosperity, i.e., over-work, we would be as we were.

Looked at from a class point of view, this must be so, since you and I and the class to which we belong always as a class get less than we produce, with the result that sooner or later there is bound to be a glut of products, with the consequent slackening down and the old game of looking around for a job.

You can not escape from this dilemma under capitalism. In any case, and from our standpoint, it is morally wrong to allow a small class—a minority in the community—to so dictate and order the lives of the majority, to which you and I belong, as to turn what would otherwise be a pleasant world into a perfect jungle.

In the suffering which our class is enduring at present we are paying the penalty for our neglect of economic science. And when Mr. Hoover said, the other day, that Europe must work or starve, he uttered a plain truth. But he might have gone further and explained to us how those who do all the work in Europe, and elsewhere are always on the verge of starvation, while those who perform no social service whatever can riot in luxury and ease.

The cry of foreign competition is a bogey, a decoy-duck, and you would be wise to turn a deaf ear to those who would set you against our fellows in other countries. You and I have more in common with our mates in America, Japan, Russia, aye, and in Germany than we have with our native capitalists of Britain. When we appreciate that and clasp hands across our fictitious national boundaries we shall be on the right road to gaining the world for the world's workers. T. B.

LENIN'S PEACE TERMS.

A Wireless Interview.

(From the "Manchester Guardian," Aug. 8)

PARIS.—What the "Humanite" claims to be a full report of the recent interview by wireless between the United Press representatives and M. Lenin, is published this morning. In the course of his statement, M. Lenin states that he is prepared to hold to his agreement with Mr. Bullitt as regards making peace with Kolchak and Mannerheim. He recalls to the attention of the world that one of the clauses in this agreement, to which he still holds in its entirety, is to provide for the full payment of the debts of Russia to France and to other States; this on condition that the peace is a full one, signed and formally confirmed by the five Great Powers.

The correspondent asked him: "What is the real nature of the activity of the Soviet Government in the Mohammedan countries outside Russia?" M. Lenin answered: "This propoganda is exactly the same as we are carrying on in the Mohammedan Republics of our own territory. We help with all our power every growing nationality which offers a resistance to the Japanese and American brigands of capitalism. Further, our political aim is to spread the knowledge of our own Soviet Constitution which is unfortunate enough to be more to the taste of upwards of forty million inhabitants of the earth, among all colonial subject nationalities who are oppressed and without rights, both in Eastern Europe and America, over whom the bourgeois "democratic" constitutions hold the yoke of small capitalistic minorities—that is, the great mass of working natives in the colonies of Asia, Africa and so on." Lenin is confident, however, that his system will win in the mere course of events, and therefore has no hesitation in offering fair terms of peace to his attackers, whoever they may be.