



Trade Unionists and Politics.

Why should Working Men and Members of Trade Unions trouble themselves about Politics and Elections?

Because, great as is the work which Trade Unionism has done in the past and can yet do, it cannot of itself solve the poverty problem. Such questions as unemployment, the place of machinery in industry, ownership of land and monopolies, enter into the evils which Trade Unionism tries to cure, and yet Trade Unionists cannot cure one of them unless they take part in politics. All these matters can be dealt with by the Member of Parliament, and not by the Trade Union secretary; they can be settled by Acts of Parliament, not by Trade Union Congress resolutions. The Trade Unionist, therefore, who takes no interest in politics, or who votes for reactionary candidates, destroys as a citizen the good work which he is doing as a Trade Unionist.

Parliament alone can grant the demand of the Trade Unionists, of this as of every other country, for a legal enactment of

An Eight Hours Day.

The miners specially, by an overwhelming majority, have voted for an Eight Hours Bill, because they are satisfied that a short working day in their trade can only be quickly and permanently secured by an Act of Parliament. Other Trade Unionists should back their demand by voting for those candidates only who promise to support an Eight Hours Bill.

Again, the Government is the largest employer of labor in the kingdom, and it ought to be

The Best Employer.

Many thousands of skilled and unskilled workers are employed in the five Government dockyards and the Royal arms factories. In spite of the improvements effected in recent years, these workmen still have many grievances which could be speedily remedied, and the remedying of which would immediately improve the condition of Labor all round.

Nor is the Government yet as strict as it should be about payment of Trade Union wages by contractors. The London County Council enforces in all its contracts a rigid adherence to Trade Union wages and conditions, but the Government asks only for "fair wages," and scarcely insists on them.

Exactly the same complaints are made where the Government has a complete monopoly of an industry. In the Postal and Telegraph service no fewer than 136,000 persons are employed. Yet while an annual profit of say £3,000,000 is made, many of the employees are underpaid and overworked, whilst they have no prospect of promotion.

For the continuance of all these evils the working men and especially

The Trade Unionists are to blame.

If those whose chief interest it is to see that the State is made in every department a model employer do not take an active interest in elections, and if they allow any candidate to be elected over and over again, regardless of his views on these questions, they must expect that they and their fellows will be sweated by employers, whether public or private.

But there are other reasons why working men should take an active part in political movements. In spite of their differences of opinion upon many political questions, working men are all united in demanding some immediate social legislation. Foremost they want

A Proper and Efficient Employers' Liability Act,
free from the obnoxious contracting-out clause.

Working men and women are specially concerned in demanding also an immediate relaxation of the

Harshness of the Poor Law,
especially as it affects the aged and the infirm.

They should refuse to vote for any candidate who is not in favor of

Universal State Pensions for the Aged.

Moreover, there are certain things which Parliament must not do. Of these the most

Vital to Trade Unionists

is undoubtedly that no attempt should be made to tamper with the legal freedom which Trade Unions at present enjoy. Several members of the Royal Commission on Labor have expressed themselves in favor of converting Trade Unions into legal corporations, so that, to put it plainly, the whole Union may be made responsible for the acts of one or two of its members. The immediate and unanimous protest of the Labor members of the Commission put a spike in this capitalistic gun. It is still necessary that every Trade Unionist should observe carefully what the candidates who come before him have to say upon this subject. Let every Trade Unionist see to it that his candidates are severely questioned on all these points;* let him lay the answers he receives before his lodge or branch meeting and before his Trades Council, so that all his fellow-workmen may know with whom they have to deal and may decide accordingly what candidates they will support at the election. If the million-and-a-half Trade Unionists in the kingdom took the trouble to make their strength felt by Parliamentary candidates, they would go a long way towards electing a House of Commons alive to their grievances and determined to redress them. If nothing is done, Trade Unionists will be largely to blame.

* See Fabian Tract No. 24, Questions for Candidates, and No. 37, A Labor Policy for Public Authorities, 6 for id., or 1/- per 100. Other Tracts are No. 48, Eight Hours by Law, id.; No. 50, Sweating: its Causes and Remedy, id.; No. 47, The Unemployed. The Set of 57 Tracts, post free 2/3. Bound 3/9.































