

Municipal Tramways.

WHY NOT MUNICIPALISE THE TRAMWAYS?

In London, for instance, the 126 miles of tramways are in the hands of one large and ten smaller companies, whose aggregate capital, swollen, as usual by legal and Parliamentary expenses, amounts, as stated in the table below, to nearly

THREE AND A HALF MILLIONS STERLING.

Their receipts exceed the working expenses by about £240,000 annually, or nearly 7 per cent. on their nominal capital, which goes to maintain the body of eight or ten thousand share and debenture holders, who are at present permitted to derive a tribute from London's need of locomotive facilities. The shareholders of the largest company, owning one-third of the whole of the lines (North Metropolitan), have for many years received a dividend of between 9 and 10 per cent. per annum on their shares.



Statistics of the Length, Capital Expenditure, Receipts, Expenditure, and Net Profit of the Tramway Companies in London, for the year 1890.

How this dividend is obtained is known to all men. The 5,000 tramway drivers, conductors, horsekeepers and labourers working London's 940 licensed tramcars (C—5761, p. 9), are among the hardest worked, most cruelly treated, and worst paid of London's wage slaves. Sixteen hours' work for 4s. wage is no uncommon day's record; whilst Sundays or other holidays are

known to them only as times of extra traffic. Tramway servants in other towns (with the one exception of Huddersfield) are in much the same state. Nor is it possible to remedy this "white slavery" whilst the tramways remain in private hands. Mrs. Reaney and other well known philanthropists have in vain used every mode of appeal to the consciences of the shareholders. The Trade Union of Tramway Servants is powerless. The pulpit and the press equally fail to induce them to forego even a quarter per cent. of dividend in order to improve the condition of the servants by whose toil they live.

But why should London leave its most important lines of internal communication in private hands, to be used as a source of private tribute, wrung from the oppression of the workers? In 29 provincial municipalities and urban districts of Great Britain the local authority itself owns the local tramways, amounting in the aggregate to 244 miles, or more than a fourth of the whole tramway mileage. Most of these corporations lease out the lines to exploiting companies; but they can put what conditions they please in the leases, and if the tram servants of Liverpool, Glasgow, or Birmingham are oppressed, the remedy is in the hands of the municipal electors. But one corporation, at any rate, does not shrink from the

DIRECT ORGANISATION OF LABOUR,

and gives no opportunity to the middleman. The Huddersfield Town Council obtained statutory power in 1882 (45 and 46 Vic., c. 236) to work its own tramways; and has done so with marked success and an annual profit. The Liverpool Corporation demanded similar statutory power in 1889, but has not yet taken over its lines. The Glasgow Corporation has lately resolved to follow the example of Huddersfield. The London County Council already owns and works a (free) steam-ferry at Woolwich, served by two steamboats lit by electricity.

The public has now an unparalleled opportunity in the matter. The tramway companies only received their concessions on condition that the local authority should have power to take over the whole concern at the expiration of 21 years from the time when the promoters were empowered to construct the line in each case, upon payment only of the actual value of the stock and plant (33 and 34 Vic., cap. 78, sec. 43). The first company completed this period, as regards part of its lines, in 1891; and, after fierce opposition from the reactionary members, the London County Council resolved, in October, 1891, to exercise the rights given to it by Parliament, and to take over the four miles of line which had fallen in, on payment of the actual value of the rails and plant. *Tramways - U.K.*

In nearly every succeeding year a further portion of London's tramways can become London's property in this way. The same is the case in other towns. But the workers must insist upon the rights of the public being exercised; or the capitalists will once more juggle us out of our inheritance. Insist on the taking over of every piece of tramway as soon as possible. But there are two ways of taking over the tramways. Either the public line may be leased out to capitalists to exploit the tram slaves as before; or the Town or County Council may work the line itself without any contractor. The first is the method of Liverpool; the last is the method of Huddersfield, soon to be copied by Glasgow. Under the one system, the worker still has to work 16 hours a day; but under the management of the Huddersfield Town Council, the tramway servants work in two shifts EIGHT HOURS a day each.

Workers, insist that the Town or County Council shall obtain power to manage as well as to take over the tramways.

