

To ALL RAILWAY WORKERS

By HARRY POLLITT

THE ferment inside the N.U.R. Shopmen's branches as well as the branches of the various Craft Unions catering for railway workers in respect to the Shopmen's Arbitration Award, is easily understood.

For years the interests of railway shopmen have been shamefully neglected, owing to the internal quarrels between the N.U.R. and those Craft Unions which have members employed on the railways, as to which Unions had the right to negotiate on behalf of the shopmen. The N.U.R. claimed that all men employed on the railways should become members of the N.U.R. The Craft Unions contested this point of view, and always tried to establish for their members working on railways district wages and conditions.

At every Trade Union Congress, there are appeals either from the N.U.R. as against the Craft Unions, or vice versa. The poor shopmen are always between the "devil and the deep blue sea." They always get advances of wages weeks after other workers who may be working on precisely similar work. All their negotiations are prejudiced by these quarrels. The shopmen are the Cinderellas of the railway industry.

A Base Award

The culmination of this "from pillar to post" policy has been to place the shopmen in that position, where their claims have had to be considered in a period of exceptional trade depression, while the traffic workers of the N.U.R. had their claims considered in much better circumstances. This is clearly seen. The base rates for traffic workers under their Award are 100 per cent above their 1914 rates, whilst the base rates for the shopmen (including the craftsmen) are only 30 per cent above 1914 rates.

True the shopmen have a bonus of 26s. 6d. on the top of their base rates, which will bring their wages up to a level approximating to the cost of living, or the district rate of wages paid for similar work in private locomotive shops, *but we must remember that this bonus is not a permanent bonus*, indeed to the consternation of the very men who negotiated the Shopmen's Award, certain Railway Companies are already asking for 16s. 6d. to be taken off this bonus immediately.

It will cause Splits

It was obvious that this attack would be made. The Unions in the Engineering Industry have suffered a 16s. 6d. reduction, which affects craftsmen and unskilled workers in locomotive firms building new rolling stock for Railway Companies.

Is it not clear that these Railway Companies will want the same reduction in their locomotive shops? This will bring the wages of many classes of shopmen below the district rate for similar work, even in the same town. It will revive the old quarrels and intensify the friction which has always existed even among members of the same Union, some of whom have been working in railway shops, and others for private firms.

To the shopmen in the N.U.R. it means that their wages will be below the traffic men on less skilled work. This will prompt the Railway Companies to try to persuade the traffic men to agree to a lower base rate; and if persuasion fails then force will be used. The shopmen's low wages will be a lever to force further down the wages of the traffic men.

Reject the Award

Already the boys, juniors and women members of the N.U.R. have had reductions. Shopmen and traffic men did not realise the necessity of making a united move to prevent this. They thought their positions secure. Now it is the turn of the shopmen; and unless this award is rejected it will be the traffic men who will be attacked next. They will find the full force of the Railway Companies exerted to force a reduction in their base rates; just as and when all other sections of railway workers have had their wages reduced.

Traffic men and shopmen must combine to reject this award.

The shopmen stood by the traffic men in the 1919 strike. The traffic men must stand by the shopmen in their attempts to reject this award. The Craft Unions whose members are affected must come to an agreement with the N.U.R. so that all can combine in a united attempt to reject an award, which will not only intensify the quarrels between the Craft Unions and the N.U.R., but will split the various Craft Unions also.

United Action Now

Whilst we realise the only solution for these internal conflicts between the various Railway Unions is *One Big Union for all Railway Workers*, we understand the nature of the immediate task. The shopmen's Award must not be looked at from a sectional point of view. It represents an insidious attempt on the part of the Railway Companies to force wage conditions on one section, which must inevitably react on all other sections of the railway workers.

We therefore urge that an immediate campaign be inaugurated to negotiate an award that gives the same increase in wages to the shopmen over their 1914 rates, as the traffic men have over theirs.

This will make a united front of all railway workers and prepare them for the coming struggle on the question of working hours.