

A VOICE FROM THE ALIENS

About the Anti-Alien Resolution of the Cardiff Trade Union Congress

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We, the organised Jewish workers of England, taking into consideration the Anti-Alien Resolution, and the uncomplimentary remarks of certain delegates about the Jewish workers specially, issue this leaflet, wherewith we hope to convince our English fellow workers of the untruthfulness, unreasonableness, and want of logic contained in the cry against the foreign worker in general, and against the Jewish worker in particular.

It is, and always has been the policy of the ruling classes to attribute the sufferings and miseries of the masses (which are natural consequences of class rule and class exploitation) to all sorts of causes except the real ones. The cry against the foreigner is not merely peculiar to England; it is international. Everywhere he is the scapegoat for other's sins. Every class finds in him an enemy. So long as the Anti-Alien sentiment in this country was confined to politicians, wire-pullers, and to individual working men, we, the organised aliens, took no heed; but when this ill-founded sentiment has been officially expressed by the organised working men of England, then we believe that it is time to lift our voices and argue the matter out.

It has been proved by great political economists that a working man in a country where machinery is greatly developed produces in a day twice as many commodities as his daily wage enables him to consume. For one half, he himself is the market; for the rest (the surplus), a market must be found elsewhere. Until the market is found, and the surplus sold off, the worker must remain idle—unemployed.

The greater the producing power, the larger the surplus. The larger the surplus is, the longer is the period of unemployment. The larger the number of the unemployed, the keener and fiercer is the competition for work. Consequently, the harder are the times and the greater the sufferings of the worker. Who, then, is to be blamed? Surely we cannot blame the foreign working man, who is as much a victim of the industrial system as is the English working man. Neither can we blame the machine which displaces human labour. The only party at fault is the English working class itself, which has the power, but neither the sense nor courage, to make the machines serve and benefit the whole nation, instead of leaving them as a source of profit for one class. To punish the alien worker for the sin of the native capitalist is like the man who struck the boy because he was not strong enough to strike his father.

We will assume for the sake of argument, that the foreign worker is injurious to the English worker, and that the Government will prohibit him from coming here. What then England as a Free Trade country would thereby suffer severely; because the same commodities which the foreign worker used to produce here (being at the same time a source of income to the country), he will then produce abroad—much cheaper, too, because the cost of living is lower there. Those commodities will then be imported here. Will this benefit the English worker? Let Mr. Freak and Mr. Inskip answer.

The Freakians and Inskipians claim that the immigration of workers from other countries over-gluts the labour market, displaces English labour, and reduces the wages of the

native workmen. From this it would logically follow that the emigration of workers from the country would have the contrary effect, i.e., would relieve the market, and thus bring on good times. In short, the more the immigration, the worse for a country; the more the emigration, the better for a country. If this is so, then how will they account for the following facts and figures:

The average annual immigration of Aliens in England according to the report of the Board of Trade for 1891-92-93 has been 24,688,¹ whilst the average annual emigration is put down by the Dictionary of Statistics at 164,000.² In face of those figures, we repeat our argument. If immigration over-gluts the market then emigration must logically relieve it. And, seeing that the emigration is more than six times the immigration, we cannot see why England should cry out so loudly about the foreigner. We will carry the question further, and we will prove to our English fellow workers that immigration or emigration in no way affects the condition of the working men or the state of the labour market.

In Germany the immigration is one-tenth of the emigration. In the United States it is vice versa. Still, the wages of a tailor in Germany is 15s, whilst in the United States it is 58s. What will our opponents say to this? Again, in 1831-40 the immigration in the United States was 699,000. In 1881-89 it was 4,792,000; still, in the former period the daily wage of a tailor was 4s 6d, whilst in the latter period it was 8s 4d.³ With these statistics in view we can safely say, that if the English worker has reason to be dissatisfied with his lot, let him not blame his foreign fellow working man; let him rather study the social and labour question—he will then find out where the shoe pinches.

Leaving the foreign worker in general, we will now deal with the Jewish worker in particular.

We, the Jewish workers, have been spoken of as a blighting blister upon the English trades and workers, as men to whose hearts it is impossible to appeal, and were it not for us, the condition of the native worker would be much improved, he would have plenty of work, good wages, and what not. Well, let us look into facts; let us examine the condition of such workers with whom the Jew never comes in contact, such as the agricultural labourer, the docker, the miner, the weaver, the chain maker, ship builder, bricklayer and many others. Examine their condition, dear reader, and answer: Is there any truth in the remark that we are a “blighting blister” upon the English worker?

It is alleged that we are cutting down the wages of the English worker, and no proof is given in support of such an allegation. We on the other hand claim that English workers are reducing our wages and we will prove our claim.

That the ready-made clothing trade, the second class-made to order tailoring trade, the mantle, waterproof clothing, cap, slipper, and cheap shoe trades have been created by the Jewish workers in this country—no one who knows anything about it will deny. Mr. Booth in his book *Life and Labour of the People*,⁴ declares “That the ready-made

clothing trade is not an invasion on the employment of the English tailor, but an industrial discovery.”

In the report of the Board of Trade on the effects immigration, speaking of the boot and shoe trade we find the following⁵ “The foreign Jews are, to a large extent, engaged on a common class of boots and shoes, some of which probably could not profitably be made by English labour under the existing statement, and might hence cease to be produced, or at least leave London (either for the provinces or abroad) were it not for the presence of Jewish labour.” The reader should not fall into the mistake that the Jewish worker can produce the cheap class of boots because he will work for lower wages - far from it. In fact, the Jewish workers earn better wages in this cheap class than the English do in the better class. This is due to their great abilities in turning out large quantities. In a circular issued by the Mantle Makers’ Union to the mantle manufacturers we read the following; “Germany and France, though behind England in the evolution of other trades, were ahead of her in the mantle trade. They have created a new branch of the trade in question. They have combined the quality, style, and workmanship of the bespoke tailor made, with nearly the cheapness of the cheap ready made. How did they do it? By applying the present mode of capitalistic manufacture — that is, production on a large scale, use of machinery and the division of labour, to the bespoke tailor-made garment. Thus England has been a market for Germany and France. Some years ago, certain English manufacturers realised that the same class of garments could be made in this country. Circumstances brought to England the class of workers, experts in that work, and the trade is now rapidly growing.” This is again corroborated by an article on the mantle trade, which appeared in a German periodical, the *Neue Zeit*, No. 39, of the year 1893, where the writer points out to his countrymen the cause of the diminution of the mantle trade in Germany. “The cause is”, he says, “the transference of the trade to England by the Russian and Polish Jews.” We could fill a book with quotations, statements, and figures, in favour of our claim. From what has been said, the truth-seeking reader will see how groundless is the accusation that we displace English labour.

Not only are we engaged in trades which we have introduced, but we have to a very great extent provided work for the English workers. According to the report mentioned above, the Jewish workers that are employed in the boot and shoe trade are less than 1 and a half per cent, of the total number of workers employed in that trade. The export of boots and shoes from the United Kingdom from the year 1873 till 1893 increased about 25 per cent. Taking into consideration that the Jewish products are mostly exported, and that their influx into the boot and shoe trade took place during that period, is it not reasonable to assume that the great increase in trade is to some extent due to them?

But that is nothing to what has been accomplished in the clothing trades. The trousers and vests are made entirely by English women; the weaving, cutting, book-keeping, and all work connected with the counting house is performed only by English men and women. We will also remind our English friends of the fact that when the Jewish tailors of Leeds struck in 1888, the English workers in the cloth mills were put on half time.

When you, our English fellow workers, cry out so loud against our competition, while you fail to prove that it exists at all, when you call us a blighting blister, then what ought we to say to our English sister-slaves who are actually taking the bread out of our mouths by working for half the price, and are driving us out of the workshops which we have built up? Can they deny that they are making a mantle for a shilling, for which we have received two shillings?

We feel their throat-cutting competition in every trade which we have created, and which they have stepped into. Those who investigate the subject readily admit it. Thus we read in the report of the Board of Trade the following statements: “At present the Jews need only fear the competition with the English female labour.” Again: “In the machining department, where foreign men compete with English women, the latter are gaining ground on the former.”⁶

In view of the foregoing facts, we ask the impartial reader: Who is competing with whom, who is displacing whom—the Jew the English, or the English the Jew! We have been branded by the Freakians and Inskippians as a class of people who are behind in the labour movement, who will not be organised, and to whose hearts it is impossible to appeal. We beg leave to ask these gentlemen whether their appeals to our hearts during the boot makers struggle with their masters did or did not find a response? If their memories fail them, we will recommend them to the Strike Committee. Did it require much appealing to our hearts in the time of the great miners’ struggle to induce us to organise a committee which raised £38 16s 4d, besides what our Unions donated from their funds? We could enumerate many instances which would illustrate the deep sympathy with which the hearts of the Jewish working men are filled in response to every appeal made to them by their English fellow workers. But we must restrain, lest it be said that we are “boasting”.

The gentlemen named above would have the world believe that we are blacklegs, and that we will not be organised. True, some of us are hard to be convinced of the benefits of organisation, but when we can point to an army of 3,000 union men in London alone, out of a total of about 10,000 Jewish working men, then we believe that we can hold up our heads against either English, Scots, Irish, or Welsh.

That there are some blacklegs amongst us is nothing more than natural, you will find them among all nations. But one thing must be admitted. It is this; That we have not amongst us an official organised army of blacklegs, such as the English can boast of, viz., “A free labour party”.

We are behind the English working men in the labour movement, but were we not in front of them in the last 1st of May demonstration?

Just as we were about to write our concluding remarks in this leaflet, we have been informed by the Press that a deputation of the organised English working men met

the Government and laid before them many resolutions that were passed at the Cardiff Congress. Of all that was asked, only one thing was granted. It is this: That all alien exploiters, swindlers, blacklegs, drunkards, idlers of all sorts who *have* money are welcomed here; but that skilful, industrious, honest working men, who have either been out of work for a long time, or have been locked out by their masters for taking part in strikes and boycotts, and therefore have no money, shall be prohibited from coming here.

We cannot congratulate the English working-class on this achievement. We believe that with all its influence with its great organisations and enormous funds, with its millions of votes, and, above all, with its great intelligence it ought to have achieved something better and nobler. In conclusion, we appeal to all right-thinking working men of England not to be misled by some leaders who have made it their cause to engender a bitter feeling amongst the British workers against the workers of other countries. Rather hearken to the voices of such leaders as will foster a feeling of international solidarity among the working people.

In conclusion, we appeal to our fellow-workers to consider whether there is any justification whatever for regarding as the enemies of the English workers the foreign workers, who, so far from injuring them, actually bring trade here and develop new industries; whether, so far from being the enemies of the English workers, it is not rather the capitalist class (which is constantly engaged in taking trade abroad, in opening factories in China, Japan, and other countries) who is the enemy, and whether it is not rather their duty to combine against the common enemy than fight against us whose interests are identical with theirs.

Independent Tailors, Machinists, and Pressers' Union.
United Ladies' Tailors and Mantle-Makers' Union.
United Cap Makers' Union.
The International Bakers' Union.
Independent Cabinet Makers' Association.
East London Branch of the National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives.
Amalgamated Society of Tailors, Jewish Branch.
Slipper Makers' Union.
The International Sew-Round and Operative Union.
Upper Machiners' Union.
Cabinet Makers' Alliance, Hebrew Branch.

References (as in original leaflet)

1. see page 9
2. *Dictionary of Statistics* p 247
3. *Ibid* pp 579, 583, 251
4. Booth's *Life and Labour of the People*, p 213
5. *Report of the Board of Trade, 1891-2-3*, pp 93, 94
6. *Report of the Board of Trade 1891-2-3*, pp 93, 94

A Voice From The Aliens is the first leaflet against immigration controls. It was produced in 1895. It is part of the hidden history of immigration controls.

The leaflet was published in the name of several Jewish trade unions. Jewish refugees started to come to this country in the 1880s – fleeing persecution in Eastern Europe and Tsarist Russia. At this time there were no immigration controls. However there was very quickly racist agitation for controls. Unfortunately the trade union movement – and many of the early socialist groups – took up the demand for restrictions. In the early 1890s the TUC passed several resolutions in favour of control – including one at its 1894 Cardiff conference.

Jewish workers, often organized in their own unions, fought back against this demand for immigration controls. One of many examples of the fight back was the *Voice From The Aliens* leaflet. The leaflet was launched at meetings in London and Leeds where the main speaker was Eleanor Marx – the daughter of Karl Marx. In September 1902 a meeting against restrictions was called by, the mainly Jewish, Federated Tailors Union of London. This attracted more than 3000 people.

In the end the battle was lost and the first controls were enacted in 1905. However the leaflet and other activities by Jewish workers started two traditions. First is the tradition of the self-organisation of those against whom controls are aimed. So today it is the undocumented, those without immigration status, who are organising against deportations and detentions. Second is a tradition that needs to be revived – that is opposition to immigration controls in their totality. Those who today argue for “fair” or “just” immigration controls ought to realize that over a century ago trade unionists were fighting controls in principle. They rejected all notions of “fair” controls and instead appealed for workers solidarity against a system that exploits all workers.

This leaflet is produced by *No one Is Illegal*. *No One Is Illegal* is a group of trade unionists who have been long involved in the struggles against immigration controls. We oppose controls in their totality and are committed to working with the labour movement. Our own literature can be found at www.noii.org.uk. In particular, stimulated by *A Voice From The Aliens*, we have produced our own pamphlet for trade unionists – *Workers Control Not Immigration Controls*. This has received trade union sponsorship. We are happy to provide a speaker to discuss our opposition to immigration controls. Our email is info@noii.org.uk. All donations for this pamphlet and to support our work to be made out to *No One Is Illegal* and sent to No One Is Illegal, The Socialist Club, 16 Wood St, Bolton BL1 1DY.

An original copy of this leaflet can be found in the Rollins Collection Modern Record Centre, Warwick University.