



## ENGINEERS AT WAR 1939-1945

Richard Croucher

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'On the one hand we are working under a capitalist system, more highly organised for exploitation, even than in peace time. Every advantage that the employers can secure from collaboration and relaxation will be, and is being, ruthlessly acquired throughout the industry. No sacrifices are being made by the employers. No fraction of managerial power is being surrendered. Instead of sacrifice, the employers have actually strengthened their position in relation to the sub-division of labour, while their profits are guaranteed. For the workers it is truly a war on two fronts, or, if you like, back and front.'

(From a sub-committee report to the Manchester AEU District Committee, 8 January 1942)

This quotation given in Richard Croucher's book highlights the dilemma of many trade unionists, socialists and communists in the early period of the Second World War and its theme is central to this important contribution to the history of working class struggle. Despite the gloom of the quotation major advances were made by trade unionists, often in spite of their leadership, and big business would do well to read this book if only for them to realise what might happen to their system if Thatcher continues her warlike stances.

The strong material interests which trade unionists had in winning the war against fascism did not blunt their class instincts and most remained highly critical of management activities and inefficiencies throughout the war years. It *was* an engineers' war and the soldiers at the rear, the soldiers of production, played the major part in winning the war. The workers accepted a

'no strike' policy and compulsory arbitration (almost!) together with unrestricted overtime working and many other sacrifices, although it took until 1942 before the trade unions were able to gain a voice in production policy at the workplace — through joint production committees or the extended role of shop stewards. Workers *were* concerned about delays in production and shortage of supplies. Frankly the managements were reluctant to concede anything to gain workers co-operation. Even in the middle of the war they had to be bludgeoned, they had



to be forced, and repeatedly in the Coventry area for example (where I was District Secretary of the Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions) it was necessary to bring in one or other of the ministries for special enquiries into the misuse of materials or labour due to inefficient management.

The managers didn't like it; they hated the interference from outside which this represented and they resented the growing strength and influence of the trade unions.

In some respects Richard Croucher under-estimates this working class approach to winning the war but his book contains much useful material and has written it up in a remarkably readable fashion, bringing out from the dirt and grease of the workshop the considerable activities of rank and file trade unionists during the war and the rearmament period leading up to it. He traces the increasing confidence and independent outlook of engineering workers as fuller employment became the order of the day. To the amazement of the older AEU skilled men the apprentices became militant and demonstrated on more than one occasion how determined organisation and strikes can succeed. Women workers also moved out from their inferiority...(Croucher writes)

'Many of the women entrants of the Second World War had been exposed to the "rate for the job" argument and made it their own. In due course the Equal Pay Act and the attendant upturn in equal pay agitation would be the result. But there were wider implications. Even if only briefly, many women had experienced trade unionism in a highly political form. A very high proportion of the new trade union members of the war were persuaded to pay the political levy; many experienced the primitive democracy of workplace meetings; others read and discussed factory newspapers. There can be little doubt that these and other encounters with factory politics lay behind the largest ever women's vote for the Labour Party in 1945.'

The importance of this statement should be measured against the fact that at the peak of the war effort one in three engineering workers were women.

The book provides plenty of evidence of working-class advance although Croucher tends to imply an unholy alliance of Bevin, the Communist Party and the trade union leaders to make the class struggle redundant. I was one of the most active trade unionists in the Coventry area (a major centre of war production) during the whole of the war years and I can truthfully say that in the many disputes which occurred the argument of 'the war effort' was never used to stop a strike or prevent workers pressing their grievances. It really wasn't necessary — people didn't need to be told of the dangers of a possible fascist invasion and in any event it was workers and their families that suffered from the concentrated bombing attacks on Coventry, Birmingham, Plymouth, East London, Liverpool and so on. (Incidentally my family and I were

bombed-out in the process). We *all* wanted to see Hitler and the fascists defeated. But that did not mean that trade unionists allowed employers to ride roughshod over them. Anyone who lived in the middle of events, as I did, knows how much the employers' wings were clipped. Some tried to 'duck from under' but union strength and the shop steward system grew beyond anything known previously in the history of the trade union movement.

Workers increased their negotiating power against the background of wartime legislation, the importance of maintaining production and full employment. Management simply had to listen and the foremen lost their right to hire and fire and dispense personal favouritism. A significant feature of the war period was the growth in trade union membership and shop steward participation. One gets the impression that Croucher overlooks the degree to which the class war was waged in this direction although he does deal extensively with some of the major engineering strikes which took place.

The book draws heavily on the records of the AEU (especially some of its district committees) and the activities of rank and file movements, the Communist Party and other left groups, in the engineering industry. For some reason, however, information is very limited on the role of unions other than the AEU and little is said about the Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions all of whom had quite a part to play during the period. Croucher therefore only presents part of the story of the Engineers' War and some of his conclusions are controversial to say the least. On the other hand there must be a welcome for such a substantial effort.

**Jack Jones**

### **THE ETHIOPIAN REVOLUTION**

**Fred Halliday and Maxine Molyneux**  
Verso and New Left Books 1981. £5.95 pbk  
*ISBN 0 86091 741 X.*

Events in the Horn of Africa since 1974 have confounded and divided the Left. What to make of a war between the new 'revolutionary' Ethiopian regime and a Somalia, whose efforts to build 'socialism' in the early 1970s won plaudits — especially with both of them backed by the Soviet Union at some stage? Or of the Ethiopian ruler, proclaimed a 'true revolutionary' by Fidel Castro himself, yet still locked into a continuing and gruelling war with an Eritrean liberation movement that proclaims its own commitment to 'Marxism-Leninism'? Or of the other conflicts that pit the centralised authority in Ethiopia against insurrectionary move-

Armiaâ€”Drills and tactics 2. World War, 1939â€”1945â€”Campaignsâ€”Chinaâ€” Manchuria 3. World War, 1939â€”1945â€”Russia (Federation). I. Title 940.5â€”425. ISBN 0-203-49625-6 Master e-book ISBN.Â Mutanchiang Heavy Artillery Regiment (8—240 mm howitzers) 13th Mortar Battalion Two independent engineer battalions Source: â€”Record of Operations Against Soviet Army on Eastern Front (August 1945)â€™, Japanese Monograph No. 154 (Tokyo: Military History Section, US Army Forces Far East, 1954), 225â€”32. The bulk of Shiinaâ€™s 124th Infantry Division was garrisoned at Muleng, Suiyang, and Hsiachengtzu, 25â€”50 miles (40â€”80 kilometers) west of the border. 1939-Secret agreement between German leader Hitler and Soviet Leader Stalin not to attack one another and to divide Poland. Lend Lease Act. Approved by Congress in March 1941; The act allowed America to sell, lend or lease arms or other supplies to nations considered "vital to the defense of the United States." THIS REPLACED the "cash and carry" policy. Winston Churchill.Â 2-4/1945: US invasion of Japanese home islands, only Japanese army left, but suicidal resistance: 30-80% US casualty rate, which convinces the US they need to use the nuclear bomb to persuade Japan to surrender. Battle of Okinawa. First Japanese Home island (only 340 miles from mainland Japan) to be invaded. Throughout World War II, women appeared in Soviet war propaganda in various capacities. Between 1939 and 1941, wary of German militarism and expansionism, Soviet propaganda encouraged women to undertake paramilitary civil defense training. After the German invasion in 1941, propaganda portrayed women participating in war-related industries, in the medical sector, or in partisan units.Â In the engineering industry alone, the number of skilled and semi-skilled female workers increased from 75 per cent to 85 per cent from 1940-1942. According to Gazeley, even though women were paid less than men, it is clear that women engaging in war work and taking on jobs preserved by men reduced industrial segregation. World War II, conflict that involved virtually every part of the world during 1939â€”45. The main combatants were the Axis powers (Germany, Italy, and Japan) and the Allies (France, Great Britain, the United States, the Soviet Union, and China). It was the bloodiest conflict, as well as the largest war, in history.Â Hitler committed suicide on April 30, 1945, and the war in Europe ended on May 8. The American â€œisland hoppingâ€” campaign had destroyed key Japanese installations throughout the Pacific while allowing bypassed islands to wither on the vine. Hundreds of thousands were killed in firebombings of Japanese cities, and the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945 knocked Japan out of the war. World War II (WWII or WW2), also known as the Second World War, was a global war that lasted from 1939 to 1945. It involved the vast majority of the world's countriesâ€”including all the great powersâ€”forming two opposing military alliances: the Allies and the Axis. In a state of total war, directly involving more than 100 million personnel from more than 30 countries, the major participants threw their entire economic, industrial, and scientific capabilities behind the war effort, blurring the

Army. Quartermaster Corps, World War, 1939-1945, genealogy Source: bplgovdocs. Folkscanomy: Military. 15,466 15K. This is a history of the combat infantry, of the artillery, the reconnaissance troop, the medical and engineer battalions, the signal, ordnance and quartermaster companies and of the division headquarters personnel." Digitized by the Combined Arms Research Library Digital Topics: WWII, United States. - - Army -- Infantry Division, 42nd, World War, 1939-1945, World War, 1939-1945 Cornell University Library. 13,064 13K. Book Preview. Panzer-Divisions at War, 1939-1945 - Ian Baxter. forgotten. Chapter One. The Army High Command envisaged that nine Panzer Divisions should be available by the autumn of 1939. A report made it clear that the men of a Panzer division should consist of the highest fighting spirit and that they were to be considered and developed as an elite unit, especially with regard to their offensive spirit. Organisation of the royal navy 1939-1945. by Dr Graham Watson. Links to Main World War 2 Pages: - Royal Navy Organisation - Casualties - killed, died, missing - 1,000 Warship Service Histories - Convoy Escort Movements - Battles, Major Warship Losses - Naval & Military Campaigns - Navies Daily , 1939-42 - Admiralty War Diaries. Admirals Sir Dudley Pound and Sir Andrew Cunningham (Wikipedia, click to enlarge). return to World War 2, 1939-1945. Appreciation. .36-Engineer Vice Admiral George Preece 03.42-Engineer Vice Admiral Frederick Turner 01.45-Engineer Vice Admiral John Kingcome. Director of Dockyards. .36-Vice Admiral [ret] Francis Talbot .40-Engineer Rear Admiral Samuel Dunlop. Induced nuclear fission was discovered in Germany in 1939 by Otto Hahn (and expatriate Jews in Sweden), but many of the scientists needed to develop nuclear power had already been lost, due to Nazi anti-Jewish and anti-intellectual policies. These bombers were painfully slow" Italian engineers had been unable to develop sufficiently large piston aircraft engines (those that were produced tended to explode through extreme overheating), and so the bombers used for the Battle of Britain were woefully undersized. When World War II ended in 1945, the small arms that were used in the conflict still saw action in the hands of the armed forces of various nations and guerrilla movements during and after the Cold War era.