

SHIPBUILDING STRIKE:

Clydeside, the cradle of the finest ships in the world, is silent. No ships are being built and none repaired. And in shipyards all over the United Kingdom, the picture is the same. The huge yards on Merseyside, too, are empty of life. For Britain's 200,000 shipyard workers are on strike, because of the employers' refusal to consider their claim for a 10 per cent wage increase. The employers say the industry cannot afford it. The unions say: "At least make an offer; at least let us negotiate". The employers propose arbitration; the unions reject it. Neither side will give way; so on Clyde and Thames, on Tyne and Mersey, workers collect their strike pay and await developments.

Not all union members are agreed about the wisdom of a strike, though all are united on the justice of their claim. The arguments go on - but behind it all lies one ugly threat - foreign competition. Here is the tanker "Evgenia Marches", recently completed at Harrow-in-Furness. She was the last of a £13,000,000 foreign order - because (the customer said) British shipbuilding is too liable to interruption - British costs are too high. Meanwhile, last year Holland built 177 ocean-going ships of nearly half a million gross tonnage; Holland, only recently ravaged by war and occupation. Other countries, too, were gaining customers Britain was losing; not far behind us in the shipbuilding race is Germany - a million tons last year, compared with our 1.4 million tons, while racing ahead to become the world's No.1 shipbuilding power is Japan with 1.7 million tons.

Some foreign unions have said they will refuse to handle ship repairs diverted from Britain; but that cannot effect the main issue - the loss of new building orders (these British shipyards are idle). The employers will not talk; the workers will not work; and the net result - the customers will not buy. In this deadlock lies disaster.