

THE DISTURBANCE AT PORTSMOUTH.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE TIMES.

Sir,—While the disturbances at the naval barracks at Portsmouth are being investigated by a tribunal that can be trusted to establish the truth regarding this matter, will you allow me to put forward some reasons why the public should suspend judgment in reference to the young stokers, who have been alleged, and I believe wrongfully alleged, to have been the originators of the riot? It is probable that the reports concerning these junior ratings of the engineer branch have arisen from the fact that about 200 stoker recruits attached to his Majesty's ship Nelson were at the time quartered in barracks at Portsmouth because there was not accommodation for them in their ship. So far as I have been able to ascertain, not one of these recruits was implicated in the disturbances. The captain of his Majesty's ship Nelson has, I am informed, lodged a protest with the Commander-in-Chief at Portsmouth against the unfounded slur cast by erroneous rumour upon these young stokers, and the public will, I believe, gladly assist to dispel the prejudice and the disfavour that has so unjustly fallen upon them.

That riotous stokers should have displayed insubordination towards a gunnery officer is an unfortunate instance of a misunderstanding between the men of one branch and the officers of another branch. If this implies faulty organization, the remedy should be applied in peace time, for a fault of this character would be of the utmost seriousness in war. One of the most reassuring episodes in the Portsmouth mutiny was that in the midst of the tumult two engineer officers asked for and obtained permission from the executive officer commanding to enter the disaffected blocks at their own risk, so that they might endeavour to persuade the rioters to return to discipline. In war it would be absolutely necessary to confer upon engineer officers executive control of the 20,000 stokers in their department. Alike in peace and war, these officers have proved themselves worthy of taking over such responsibilities, and it would conduce to the fighting efficiency of the Fleet and to our readiness for war to bestow this degree of executive authority upon them. Further, the immediate cause of the incident shows that there should be a readjustment of the relationship between bluejackets and stokers, with a view to a nearer approach to amalgamation, and that this should be accompanied by the reduction, if not by the abolition, of naval barracks.

Your obedient servant,

November 9.

ROLLO APLEYARD.