

Wednesday, January 10th.

Mr. B. PICKARD in the Chair.

SOUTH WALES.

The CHAIRMAN : Yesterday was a red letter day in the history of this Federation, (1st) because we met in Cardiff for the first time, and had our new friends with us connected with the South Wales Miners' Federation ; everyone believed the Welsh men to be good fighters when they were put into a corner. When they fought last year for 23 weeks in order to disassociate themselves with the sliding scale, the whole country sympathised with the movement, because I believe, whether it is the manufacturer, or whether it be one who is living on unearned increment, the toiling masses of the country believe the sliding scale is a means for commercial men, so that they can run the show easily, whether it slides uphill or downhill, they make their contracts fit in, in order that profits may accrue. All the year round the lawyers tell me that in good trade they have good trade, they were always on with deeds ; so many people buying property, people running new syndicates, and the lawyers reaping the benefits. When depression comes, there were people's losses and their bad concerns and various other things wanted winding up ; hence, as one lawyer told me some years ago, it does not matter either way, because you know in all cases the lawyers are always paid first, and those who have a share of 6d. in the £ come last. Now, with regard to contracts for coal, there are a certain class of individuals who always receive benefit. There is not the least doubt in my mind that the coal merchants, with rarely an exception, can live better and longer under sliding scales than either the coal-owners or workmen. In good times coal is sold and in bad times coal is sold, and profits made in each case. The coalowners tell me that the middleman gets nearly all the profits. Well then, I advise our miners to do all they possibly can to do away with everything that would be a means of putting money into the pockets of the middleman. Now with regard to the other point, South Wales is now an integral part of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain, and we met them here yesterday at dinner, and it is always said, that whenever you have had your feet under the oak, friendship is cemented. We had our feet under your tables whilst we tasted of the good things you provided for us, and I hope that Englishmen, Scotchmen and Welshmen all enjoyed yourselves. I think the necessaries of life are enjoyed by every man, and now having come to that point it is to be determined whether you intend going beyond that point—the necessaries of life. I am not going to preach a sermon on what shall be and what may be ; I wish to say that so far as Wales is concerned, no doubt in the minds of any man present, the benefits which the Federation could do for them.

RESULTS OF THE CONCILIATION BOARD.

The Federation has secured for those connected therewith the 30 per cent. minimum, thanks to us, and to those who doubt the significance of it, that the people in the Federation area have been obtaining £6,000,000 more money year by year than they would have done had that 30 per cent. been taken off as those unfortunate percentages of 1871-2-3-4. You take the last 10 years as a fair criterion, over and above what you would have had under ordinary circumstances. You have got £60,000,000 from some where that they (the owners) told us they could not afford to pay; when we get the 45 per cent. it will mean 9/- a week extra at least, that means about a little over £9,000,000 in the year and I am not including anybody in South Wales, Northumberland or Durham. I wish to ask those people who are working underground, we heard of yesterday, if that is not worth having, as it was obtained in a quiet and conciliatory manner, if not, then my experience is not worth having. Now, as compared with the tumultuous times as far back as 1854, right away to 1887, I can remember so far back, and those of us at all events have seen secured for workers better conditions under the Conciliation Board such as we never expected, and these men will never wish to revert back to the old condition of things. Some people thought that if we had been free to-day we might have got more advances, as the prices of coal were more advanced; probably we could, but if we once did that we should have no minimum or maximum like Durham and Northumberland, neither with top or bottom. The 30 per cent. minimum has been carried on for years, and has to be carried on for four years longer, and I will ask any man present if the advances of prices go up, can there be any better opportunity of getting the 60 per cent. maximum than under this scheme, and keeping it? Some people think that if we have a scheme prices will go up, and if prices do go up the 15 per cent. advance will as assuredly be got under that scheme, than under the old system. Now this Conciliation Board, which I hope to see some day, and if I do not live to see it, I hope it will come about, when the miners of this country can do without the independent Chairman. The owners do not want the independent Chairman, neither do we, except so far as this: if there is a deadlock and stopping of proceedings, then the Chairman will be bound to be called in. I believe the owners with us will adhere to that to the last moment, because meeting together and trying to settle our differences will certainly be more lasting than any arbitrary act of an independent Chairman. I think that this should be an encouragement for men to join the Union. I am told that some people say that this Conciliation Board drives men out of the Unions, and that there was nothing left to fight for. I think it was Mr. Tom. Richards who gave us at Abertillery the story about "Nothing to do," and I wish you could all have heard it. What about your ordinary work in your pits—the manager says, "Jack, you must do so and so to-day, or you must leave;" the man will not do it, and the

man is thrown on our funds at a moment's notice. There is a local Committee in every colliery for local organization. Every man ought be united to keep what I call their ordinary wages. The Board of Conciliation has regulated the standard rate of wages, and the local organizations must look after the fluctuating work in the pits, because it is the little foxes that steal the grapes. I wish to tell you that it is unity that creates your power, and with lack of power and lack of organisation locally, you can have as great many grand names as you like, but unless you have local organisation the men are bound to suffer in such localities, and whatever else is done let us see to it that locally the men are organised. That there are men outside the unions I have not the slightest doubt about that, and I can only repeat that it is unity wherein our strength is found, and I wish to say that without an aggressive organisation you cannot make as much headway as you will do with a strong organisation. If it is not out of place to say it here, I wish you all a Happy New Year

COMPENSATION ACT.

I will now deal with the Compensation Act. I said first of all when this Bill was brought into the House of Commons it was a comparatively good Bill, but when it left the House of Lords some parts of it were very unfair and very unjust, and made the Bill in some particulars almost unworkable. There are three or four amendments to be discussed, which I am not going to specify; on the other hand we don't all see the necessity of these small alterations. Last year a little criticism occurred, the criticism was new and rather raw, and we found out that where the criticism proceeded from, the Act was not so easily adjusted to the requirements of the times. We have found that large collieries were contracted out of the Act, and there it was peaceful. Well, it is a poor fish that cannot swim down the stream, but where the Act has had to be applied rigorously it has cost a great deal of money, and men to-day have to wait five or six weeks after the first fortnight before the syndicates will pay the money due, and I think this condition of things ought to be remedied. There should be no interval in receiving pay; if the money is to be paid why not pay it when due like men discharging any ordinary debt. The men cannot get any money for a fortnight to buy anything with. The man who risks his life and limbs should never have to suffer hunger after receiving a terrible injury which may terminate fatally. Under this Compensation Act many and varied decisions have been given, and I consider it would take a man a week to read through the varied decisions in the Law Courts. Look at these matters carefully, and when you have your Members of Parliament about you tell those members, whether Liberal or Tory, that this Act must be amended, and new clauses inserted to bring about a better administration of the present law.

MINES REGULATION BILL.

With regard to the Mines Regulation Bill, one almost feels alarmed to think that neither a Liberal nor Tory Government will find time to deal with the points raised in that Bill of ours. If the Liberals desired to do anything for us the Tories would not let them, and the Tory Government, with a majority of 140 say it is too early to reopen the question, and my advice is that we plod on. There are amendments that will prevent accidents, and will give to the workmen better security to life and limb all round.

MINES EIGHT HOURS BILL.

With regard to the Mines Eight Hours Bill it makes you almost swear. I do say that when the colliery owners said that we ought to get this by Trade Union effort. they either meant what they said, or belonged to a class of people who believed a lie to be better said twice than once. They say in South Wales "you don't work full time, and you don't go to work at all." Although the prices have gone up high, are you reaping the benefit of the times under your sliding scales. Coal is sold in this locality at 30/- per ton, even though they were surrounded by coalfields. We thought it a grand thing in 1872, when coal was sold at the pit mouths in Yorkshire at 30/- and it reached nearly £4 in London for three or four weeks. I ask you are you receiving *pro rata* with what the owners are pocketing. Your standard is 3/- for the collier and 3/4 for the haulier per day. I am quoting the figures given by Mr. Dalziel. Those figures were from the book written by the Secretary of the South Wales Coalowners, and in stating what the wages are I intend to take that statement rather than any others that might be made. How then, in the name of conscience can the South Wales Coalowners want you to to work any more time than eight hours from bank to bank for a standard rate of 3/4. If the owners declare that we must, by Trade Union effort, get the measure—they don't want it made law, because the men in the North of England won't work eight hours, as they are only working six and a half, and the young lads working ten and eleven hours a day. All I can say is let us press this matter forward just the same as we expect Buller to press the matter forward against Kruger, and if there is to be a fight let us fight like men and take our coats off, because the employers, although they may be mincing in their talk, did not mean to give the eight hours day by law or any other process if it could be avoided. I think we ought to begin at once. The owners say there is a coal famine on, and that they cannot get coal at any price. This, in my opinion, is the time to start an eight hours day from bank to bank, and to take the owners on their own terms, and ask the coalowners if that is the right course to take, but they would say "We only said that when we thought you could not get it at all, either by law or Trades Union." If the owners are striking us below the belt in Parliament it would not be unwise in saying "Hit them between the eyes, now."

ALTERATION OF RULE.

There is a slight alteration of rule to be considered. This rule really means politics within the Federation area—this alteration will only carry out what I have desired ever since we commenced the Federation. If any district selects a candidate, and he is approved of by the Conference, if he is a proper candidate to run, and the district has 15,000 members, the full Returning Officer's fees be paid by the Federation at once, but any district under 15,000 would be paid for in proportion to the number of members they possess. I consider that there is a sufficient incentive to get men to be candidates, especially if you are willing in your localities to find the men the money to live in London, and I think that members should be paid. There are others who think differently. We are told that there is likely to be a General Election during 1900; if there are any budding politicians, men with sterling character in the constituencies within this Federation, in which these men can be selected, now is the time; we shall never be stronger than we are to-day. In Yorkshire we have a nice little fund, and other counties have large funds, I think we must have between £400,000 and £500,000 in the Federation—we have about £170,000. I think other districts stand better than we do, and we are saving £1,000 a week in Yorkshire. If we could get this Federation to pay 1/- a member, and put it into a central fund, what could be done with it? I am not going to say you will do it, men don't like to pay, levies, but a great deal could be accomplished with 300,000 shillings, it would send a good many men to Parliament and keep them there for some considerable time.

INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS.

There is another question what I wish to speak upon, and I hope you will not take my remarks as invidious. We have from Germany, Austria and Lancashire resolutions suggesting that we hold the International Congress every two years. I can only say if ever you do that this would be the last Congress you would hold. I wish to state that if we say in this Federation that the Congress shall be held only once in two years, we practically give it up to renew at the end of two years, in my judgment the foreign section would not attend, and therefore it would drop through. Some people I know say that the Congresses do us no good, except as an outing for the delegates. I myself have never found it much of an outing. These Congresses, if they have done nothing else, have brought together the mining population of five different nations, and I consider that real good has been done by the process. We have exploded the bogey of foreign competition, and they cannot put coal into the market at anything like the prices we can in this country, because if it takes 4/5 to put coal into the market in this country, it takes 7/6 in France, Belgium and Germany. We are also competing with the Russian coalfield, but the coal has to be taken across the sea, and that being so we have a right to say to ourselves—We have exploded the bogey of foreign

competition. Foreign workers have had an improvement from the day we had our first Congress in Jolimont. I wish to say that it is a good thing, not merely for us, but for those on the Continent, and I may say that we are not as strong as we intended, and let those drop out that wish to—Durham have dropped out. I wish to say again that there is not much pleasure in going 400 or 500 miles to Paris. I count the time now, but for young men it will be a pleasure, and why should it not? Some of our men went down the mines in Belgium—it takes five persons a day to get three tons of coal, when one man averages three tons a day in this country. The International Congress will be held in Paris this year, and I want as many men to be sent from this Conference as it is possible to be sent, in order to find out the conditions of all classes of labour in connection with the works in other countries. Every country will send its machinery—every country will send everything necessary to show to other people how far they are producing materials at the lowest possible prices, and I think it would benefit the Federation to send men to find out the exact condition of things, and whether labour is working under loss in other countries, by doing so we should set other trades an example. I believe other workers are going to do it—I do not say we shall do it, but I throw it out as a hint and after the Agenda has been dealt with, you can deal with the question as you think fit.

FUTURE.

With regard to the future we have made peace with the enemy until 1904. We want to have peace, and I think everyone who believes that the working classes should be better educated, and that their conditions should be ameliorated will come to my conclusion, that a united body will be better able to compass that than isolated districts. Let us say to each other, "We are the men to do it," and if we come to that conclusion the outside world will say, "You have done good things in the past, and you are the men most likely to do better things in the future."