

Wednesday, October 2nd, 1901.

Mr. B. PICKARD, M.P., in the Chair.

FEDERATION.

Mr. PICKARD: I do not think that anything has occurred since yesterday to cause me to ask any question of any delegate here and I suppose you have all turned up—those who have not turned up, I hope have not turned down. Well, I want you to be as patient as you can, I am not strong and I shall not speak very loudly, I want the reporters to hear and not those outside. I think we can all safely congratulate ourselves this morning on our position, there have been times when it would have been rather a difficult thing for the President to congratulate—as those who have attended the Conferences will know—for when sometimes on the wage question we have not agreed but have very much disagreed, it has taken more than ordinary talk to avoid heated combustion and developments which might have made mischief. From the commencement we have done our best to meet each others views, we have said nasty things about each other but have gone on our way rejoicing, and I do not think that any movement connected with Trades Unionism has been so successful as ours. Those who have been in the work thirty years, whoever they may be, know there has been comparative failure in many Societies, whether rich or poor, but no

other Society has attempted to do what this Federation has done. As you all know, people talk about minimum wage, living wage and all sorts of things, but there was never anyone attempted to put it into a concrete form until I did—I take that little credit, I don't care about the competition, if they say they did it they can do so, this Federation knows clearly and fully where it originated and how successful it became. So far as this Federation is concerned it will not play second fiddle to any other Trades Union, the leaders may be better educated, but for pertinacity and intelligent application of a given idea we think that we are second to none. We are like, I was going to say, the lion, when we once put our teeth in we never take them out. But I am not going to preach the history of this Federation, but if it continues on the same lines as it has done before, there is a great future before it. Those who have laid out the work will not find the times easy, there are troublous times before us, because I find employers of labour in every department are like the horse leech, the more blood they get the more they want, only to come out of certain persons, who we are told have made 50 per cent. and have given bonuses of 50 per cent. on the capital, it is enough to stagger our idea of political economy when we are told that certain little districts where they were asking for reductions, and we have heard of some men far north making millions and quietly pocketing the reduction of men's wages; it makes one think that the good old times will never come on again. When humanity has stripped the worker of his flimsies and luxuries, whilst the employer will be able to provide for his own family for the next thirty generations without touching his own pocket. If we could be like Lot and Abraham, not Mabon, who said he would go one way and after looking round on the well-watered plains chose that way—if we could get our men into that frame of mind we should not need delegates and reporters.

WAGES.

We are settled so far as wages are concerned until 1904. We have a minimum wage of 30 per cent. until then; we cannot come below that, if so I believe we should destroy our agreement because the owners have a minimum which ought to satisfy them for some-time to come. They should have been very careful how they treat us, we took 30 per cent. when others took 60 per cent., for when we gave the owners the opportunity of making a fortune it would be unfair and unscrupulous to ask the men for their coppers also.

NUMBER OF MEMBERS.

I remember the time when we had a few thousands and when we were trying to form a Federation to do some good and which some one could rely upon. I can remember the time when we had only 5,000 or 6,000 in the Unions in Yorkshire and elsewhere, now we have a great many in the Federation. We have to-day, according to our statements

yesterday, members actually in the Unions, 345,000. I think we may congratulate ourselves on that we have working down and about the pits about 450,000, and when you come to look at the percentage out it is very small indeed, if you take the managers, colliery owners, officials, clerks and those who were not eligible to be in the Federation, you will see at once that there is a small proportion out of the Unions, and I can safely predict—If you keep yourselves in real form there is not much to be feared in the future so far as wages questions are concerned.

TAFF VALE DECISION.

There is another question which is an important matter as regards Trades Unions, and that is the Taff Vale decision in the House of Lords, although we have heard from Mr. Atherley Jones, K C., M.P., in his judgment there has been much exaggeration on this matter, and things are not so bad as they were painted. We had a doubt as to whether unregistered Unions would be liable equally with a registered Union. Mr. Jones' opinion is that if unlawful acts were done we were just as liable in one case as in the other; he tells us very clearly that the Unions are not responsible if local officials committed any wrong acts, unless the Union had given the local officials full power to act, Mr. Jones tells us clearly that under the new reading of the law, civil action might follow the wrongful act of an official, but whether the employers will make out a good case for compensation is another thing, it might be possible to bring a man up for a wrongful act but how far they will be able to prove the wrongful act in damages it does not say. It comes to this so far as the Taff Vale is concerned, it only applies where anybody is authorised to attack and intimidate by violence or show of force in a strike, and we come to the conclusion that we must have our rules so framed that no official, whether local or otherwise could do any unlawful act in bringing men out on strike. If the Executive Committee or Council meeting of the Association appointed anybody to do this work, then our funds are attackable and might involve our funds in thousands of pounds damage.

TIMBERING.

The question of timbering is now to the front in Yorkshire, and no doubt in other counties. The Home Secretary has placed his A B C (three points) dealing with new special rules in various districts. Our men are prepared to carry them out, but the owners are not prepared. When it is remembered how many lives are lost for want of timber it cannot be conceived why colliery owners and managers will not allow the timber to be carried to within 30 yards of the face. We ought to make it clear as we did in Southport; we said then we were willing to do certain things and we hoped that the Home Secretary would see to the carrying out of the Rules. We know some collieries in Yorkshire where the managers decline to carry out the new rules and we are asking the Home Secretary

if he will prosecute them. The Home Secretary has acknowledged our letter, if the Home Secretary and Inspectors make special rules without our consent we ought to force the Home Secretary to carry them out especially if we want our men to be safe in wind and limb. We ought to say to the Home Secretary, "If you make new special rules, if you have the courage to say it should be done you ought to see it carried out," and unless this Conference deals with this in a drastic spirit it may be that it will lay some of the pits idle in Yorkshire. I think this Conference should take the matter up and deal with it in such a way as to show the owners that we mean something. If there are 200 or 300 men who would have to face the music, proud in the consciousness of fighting for a right thing, then we ought to show the owners that we have 340,000 men at our backs.

EIGHT HOURS.

The eight hours question is a matter for congratulation in a Tory House. With a Tory Government in power you have carried during the last Session the Second Reading, and if we had had time we should have carried the Third Reading. The facilities for private members' Bills are very small in the House of Commons, and so far as I can see, a Bill which had passed its Second Reading ought to stand in the same position in the next Session, and I have advocated that for years; but no Government will do that. If the private members of the House of Commons would agree that such should be done it would be, but so long as it was left to the crack of the whip, the crack of the whip is fatal to the private members' Bills. They all complain, but when it comes to the test it is party, party. The working majority in the House of the present Government will kill itself, it will kill the country—but I will not enter into party politics. The Bill has been rejected by the Tories, never by the Liberals—I am referring to the Second Reading—It has been accepted. Mr. Balfour would not give us even a day Committee. But other Bills have been taken before ours, Bills which never ought to have taken the place of our Bill. I wish to add a tribute to Sir W. Harcourt, he gave us three days, but we were defeated by the capitalists and labour members on that occasion. I am not going to say one word against the labour members who are told how to vote by their own constituencies. I would not vote for Roberts to have £100,000, I say the common soldiers ought to have something. I think the workers should have some of the brass, they are doing their duty even yet, and the war is not over. and they do not get £100,000 grant. On the great question of the Eight Hours what have we to do with it now, the House of Commons will not give us it. My advice is, take a ballot of the men to see whether they would put in 14 days' notice. I think the time has come when we should fight; you can all fight. I do not suppose we shall drop the Bill. We shall go on fighting, and I think the day has come for this Conference to make up its mind to have it by hook or by crook. We are advised to have a Conference with Durham and North-

umberland. I have no faith in meeting people outside this Federation; we are strong enough for them to come to meet us. We have appealed to them, as they were only working 6½ hours not to interfere with those who wanted to work more. We have sent men down into these counties with good results, and we could have had 20,000 of the Durham men with us five years ago, but I say now as I did then, we are not pullers down of Societies, but builders up. But if the worst came to the worst, if the leaders in Durham and Northumberland still persist in their obduracy we would have the men in parcels rather than be told in the House of Commons that we could not convert Durham and Northumberland whereas we could have a large number only it was a question of taking them in small parcels. We have had Durham pledged with us, pledged to carry out our rules, but when they came to the test—the sticking point—they had not got the “knife.” If they leave us in one case and we turn them out in another, all I can say is, that something should be done to aggregate the mining population to go in for a scheme that would be salvation and health if only from a mere health point of view. What is the reason of colliers as a rule having such white faces? We must prosecute this matter in such a way that it will benefit the whole community.

BOYS' BILL, MINES AMENDMENT BILL, COMPENSATION BILL.

With regard to the Boys' Bill, we got it introduced into the House of Commons and we thought that the Durham and Northumberland people would help us but they were just as much opposed to that as the eight hours for men. About 90 per cent. of the coal got in Durham is worked on the eight hours principle of three shifts; I said that in the House of Commons and read the numbers therein their own reports. I think that these men ought not to think of £ s. d. but ought to think of the health of others. Mr. C. Grahami advocated this in the House and I wish he was there now; he was one of the best helpers we ever had on mining questions and I should give him a lift if there was a seat for him. Besides the Boys' Bill, we have the Mines' Bills and the Workmen's Compensation Bill. All these Bills have had no chance whatever, we got them on the orders of the day and we got them in position once or twice, and just as we thought we were going to have a debate, the Government stepped in and took the day or allowed other people to put down business which cut us clean out. In the Mines' Amendment Bill there are many things which would improve the management of our mines and make them healthier and easier to work in. It is quite clear to my mind that the pocket governs the working of the mines, and well might Mr. Macdonald declaim against such business; so far as I look at these matters, you or I must say things to provoke controversy to those men who are weak-kneed and weak-hearted. Something must be said to those men such as were met with on the platform at the Swansea Congress, they want something ringing in their ears to make them feel that a tornado is coming that will

sweep them and their politics, not into the North Sea, but into the country of humidity. Well, now for the Compensation Bill, we are fighting cases in the Courts, Lower Courts and Higher Courts. With regard to the *Lyons v. Andrew Knowles* decision—if they know anything about figures, it is in colliery offices, and as yet there is nothing final in the matter.

UNSKILLED LABOUR.

With regard to unskilled labour, we are opposed to this wherever it exists, the mines are unsafe and explosions take place almost every day, and the dangers are increased by the employment of unskilled labour. When there are to be any prosecutions and facts to be relied upon, we shall have to alter some of our tactics and take the law into our own hands. So far as Coroner's inquests are concerned, the Coroner is King in his own Court, he can take or reject any evidence, and can direct the Jury as to a verdict. I do not want to impugn all Coroners and I don't want to say they are not honest men, they do as they are trained, some are against us and some are for us. What we want the Coroner to do is, if there has been any neglect causing the death of a person, to take the side of the law; he should neither take the side of the employers or the men, but see that the law is carried out and not say things that mean nothing. With regard to the other business you have to deal with I shall leave that over to you, but one matter I must refer to is that of future Bills. I don't see that we can limit any Bill before the House of Commons, and the success of those Bills depends on you, you must take the sword in both hands, wield it as you have never done before and you must, whenever necessary, scour the country to win converts to our cause.

LABOUR REPRESENTATION.

With regard to labour representation, I don't know that I have changed my position since last year, we want seventy or eighty men in the House who would take a firm stand on all labour questions, I don't wish to touch upon another phase, I have not altered on that; I am yet a Liberal Labour member. There is only one party in the country to help us if properly directed, and that would mean the amelioration of the conditions of the workers of this country; that is position and that is what I think. This is not a Conference to talk politics or I should drop a few words of a different character. I wish to say that although we do not profess to be politicians, nearly all our work which I have been talking about has been of a political character. We pay all our men for political purposes and work. As you all know this year a large amount of money has been spent in returning officers' fees; I wish we could win more seats, but there will be a great difficulty in finding seats where we could win, there are places we could not win if we were to spend a million, but there are others we could win if we only spent the sum of £300. The result of the ballot on the shilling levy

I will not read out just now. All the figures are not in but there are sufficient to indicate the trend of opinion in the Federation; I know there is a large majority, and I will put it as creeping up to 200,000 in favour of one shilling a year being paid into a political fund. There is a large minority who do not believe in paying one shilling a year, and if they don't it is my duty to tell everybody here that it depends on you locally whether it is to be made a success or not. If it cannot be made a success we should drop it, but if it can be made a success we should proceed with it and apply it at the next general election. But first of all we must get the money, and if the levies come in alright something can be done. With regard to the whole question, before anything is definitely decided, first appoint the new Board, and then leave it to them to draw up a scheme to say what the money is for and how it is to be applied, so that there will be no ambiguity or objection as to what the fund is for or to those who have to decide what to do with the questions at issue. It will be a difficult matter to find places to fight and win, but it will be a more difficult matter to keep the whole scheme together, and if we have failures we must take the men into our confidence. I don't want it to be like a novel which says something and leaves the intelligent reader to imagine the remainder; I see a wide difference between talking about a scheme and the carrying out of that scheme. I take it we are all intelligent men who know our needs and can see from A to Z, who know the feelings, aims and aspirations and what the men expect to be done in this matter. We will all come to the conclusion that the work before us is great and those who may have to conduct it will find it an anxious time, but all those who have to fight the battle will find they are working in a grand cause. I can only hope that in this matter we shall be as united and as strong as we have been on the wage question; if we are, I believe that success will attend our efforts. Well, gentlemen, the business before us is now in your hands, I have said a few things that are quite clear, others may be vague and uncertain but my intentions are to do good for the men I represent. We want safety in our mines, we want compensation fairly paid to those who are injured, we want everything done that will create confidence in the minds of the people that when men and boys go to work in the morning, they will go with a reasonable hope that they will come home to their wives and families in safety. Therefore as I have said on other occasions we must act as one man, and so make all our efforts as successful in the future as they have been in the past.