
PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS.

NEW DELEGATES.

Mr. EDWARDS: If you will look at your agendas you will find the next item is the President's Address, which to me is the most trying ordeal of the Conference, and I think I shall be happier in the Conference when I get it over. I do not know that this feeling arises from any sort of nervousness, but a dread comes over a man in his desire to say the right thing, and only say and try to say something, if possible, which will not be rebuked the day after, something which might be helpful to the Delegates here and to all trades, and in that spirit I welcome all the Delegates here. There are a lot of new Delegates, I see, in looking round the Conference, and I say the first thing for every society is to bring the same earnest desire to this Congress that was brought thirty or forty years ago, to make that great combination much stronger than it is to-day, and to those men and others I offer a hearty welcome.

OBJECTS OF FEDERATION.

Some of you will remember the early days of the Association, now somewhat fairly found itself, and got its feet solidly set. That there is no doubt in the minds either of its members or non-members or the public generally as to the meaning, object, and purpose of this great Federation. This combination, as far as the members are concerned, is for the general uplifting of the members, and especially the primary purpose and interest is that the men who follow what we regard—and many of us have been associated with all our lives—as the most onerous and dangerous of occupations, that their lot may be made easier by the strength of this combination.

UNIONS AND MISTAKES.

Calling to mind the early difficulties arising largely from prejudice, they discovered here, there, and everywhere prejudice and

ignorance on the one side, and a great doubt as to whether men ought to trust the unions. This is because unions made great mistakes. Well, I do not know any great cause in the world, if it did any good, which had not made mistakes, and, therefore, in our own cause the feebleness inherent in ourselves there were bound to be early failures. I venture to suggest there are very few societies who have profited more by their failures than the Miners' Federation of Great Britain. We discovered, in those days, a prejudice between one county and another and one district and another, with a gross selfishness at the base of it, to try to get the trade of the others, and with all those forces it made it extremely difficult to build up this great organisation. But, happily, we have got out of those difficulties, and whether a man comes from South Wales, or from the centre of England, from the North of England, or from Scotland, they now meet together as one great human interest and one desire of doing the best they could for the men they represented.

EFFECTS OF UNIONS ON CAPITAL.

In the young days, it was said that Unions only spelt to the employers ruin to their Capital. I call to mind many of those early incidents with the employers. In those days, when it was so difficult to approach them, so difficult to get them to understand that, after all, we were not seeking the entire ruin of Capital, but that the men they employed should have a greater share of the profits and of the wealth that they produced. Experience has taught them that combinations, the growth of combinations, has not ruined Capital: that Capital in great concerns, where Unions are the strongest, is to-day quite as secure as Capital was thirty or forty years ago, when there was very little combination.

POLICY OF FEDERATION.

Our Society has no quarrel with Capital: only what we largely object to is that it is in the hands of too few people, while the crowd is kept outside. Our great Unions has helped to bridge over, and is quickly and steadily bridging over, the great differences between profits on the one hand and wages on the other. That must be our policy. We are not seeking the ruin of anybody: we are seeking the uplifting of everybody, and specially those we represent.

PRESENT OUTLOOK.

The position all round was to-day much more pleasant than in the early days of this great Union. There is an improvement in trade and the outlook for our members, and the knowledge the men have in this Federation lies largely the strength of their position; it has made it much easier to-day than otherwise would have been to deal with the great problems we are called upon to face. While in husbanding our resources for the moment and building up a better

state of society within ourselves. We are strong to-day, and I hope we shall all realise that we must be fully equipped for what might happen on the morrow.

STRIKES.

One thing, happily, we have laid for awhile, that is the bogey of strikes. To my mind, if we have accomplished nothing else than to create in the minds of every intelligent man that strikes are not the best means of settling quarrels between people, we have set an example industrially that other people will seek to follow, nationally and internationally. That these great problems wherein human interests are conflicted, wherein the poor, the poorest of the poor, are called upon to suffer most, these great problems can be settled by conciliation, a much better way than by striking and conciliation afterwards. After all there is no special alarm in the world at the strength of their Union, except from people who are purely hysterical, and we have hysterical people associated with the coal trade outside and inside, and we have men outside and to a degree in. You will find them in every walk of life, in some numbers,

RAILWAY MEN AND THE QUESTION OF MEETING UNIONS.

I hope I am not old enough to try to remember that we had better watch our own trade, but I hope it will not be taken unkindly if I make a suggestion as President of a much greater Union than another Union which seems to be struggling for recognition in this world at the present time. It is not too much for me to say, and it is a fact, and everybody understands in these days, that no great undertaking will ever be successful in the future whose management does not recognise to the full the rights of the workmen to be heard on their case. People talked of running great concerns and running great railways. They may do so. They may find the capital and the State grant concessions to them, but, after all, the great mass of people concerned—the workers—somewhere or other must have some say as to what is to be their share and portion of it. It would be a difficult matter to run any concern without workmen, and I am inclined to think if coal had to wait until the owners got it themselves they would never get it; and whilst there was a great army of 800,000 called upon to risk so much, surely it was too late in the day to attempt to burk this question by refusing to meet these men. My advice to the workers is—make the Unions strong enough that the evident sense of these men will see that they are either bound to meet or clear out of the way whilst somebody else meets them.

PRICE OF COAL.

Our own much-abused industry which has been so much abused during recent years because the general public had been called upon to pay more for their coal, although many of them, in the moment

of great disasters such as has happened in the neighbourhood of Bolton, were sufficiently humanitarian to say they were prepared to pay any price for coal, if they could be assured that the workmen were getting good wages. We have heard that for a good many years; but there is a much stronger interest in human Society than this, and, if they could get cheap coal, they were not particularly concerned whether the workmen got good wages or not.

RESPONSIBILITY FOR HIGH PRICES.

I am sure those living on the coal trade, those who have a little capital in the coal itself, are responsible for a great amount of the mischief. I have always felt that the general public, whether through the cost of transit or through the enormous profits which middle-men think fit to make—whether it is the man in London or elsewhere—I always feel it little less than shameful that the poorest of the poor are called upon to pay the enormous prices for fuel they have had to pay for years past, while the big consumers have been able to almost get their own prices. The great consumers are a little alarmed to-day because there is a sort of combination to make them pay higher prices, but I do not know that there is any desire on the part of the Miner' Federation of Great Britain to damage or destroy any industry dependent on the coal trade. We are only seeking a reasonable wage, and, while doing so, we are not responsible for the high and inflated prices secured here, there, and everywhere. It is as well that the general public should know that in no way are our men responsible. Wages are higher. What are the wages to-day? What is the general wage paid throughout the Kingdom? It is very difficult to say from this chair, but I venture to say that the coal trade, so far as it concerns the workmen, top and bottom—the men who worked—is not an overpaid industry, even with the prices now paid. The amount that is charged is not because the cost of wages has run up so high, it is charged for other reasons. I can only hope the good sense and intelligence of those who have to do with it will perceive that it is not to the permanent interests of our members to bleed everybody continually by forcing prices unduly high. We are anxious that the trade shall live and prosper; also, that those industries which depend largely on coal should not be too largely handicapped, and that the workers in the steel and iron and other trades into which coal extends so largely may find an opportunity of increasing their wages all round. It is not our desire that the price of fuel shall be risen up unduly.

CONCILIATION BOARDS.

I am sure that we are on the right lines in trying to fight those questions out round a Board of Conciliation. East, West, South, and North, these questions have been decided by those Boards; and we have discovered that, the greater the Unions outside, the more powerful were the people who act for workmen as Conciliators round those Boards.

COST OF PRODUCTION.

With regard to our industry, I do not know that I am at all exaggerating when I say that the general trend, as years go on, except the application of machinery, is that the extraction of coal from the earth will become dearer—will become more costly—than it is to-day. This could be relieved by the application of machinery. However, I do not think we need get nervous or alarmed because the cost of coal has gone up. There have been times in the history of the coal trade when the coal had to go to the market and had got to be disposed of, and was disposed of, at higher prices than prevailed to-day; and that was a state of things in the coal trade for many years; and, if our Federation can only steady down these enormous differences as between one epoch and another, so that mining might run as smoothly and as regularly as many other industries, it will have accomplished a great thing for the coal trade and the world in general.

EFFECT OF TRADES UNIONISM.

I should like to say that we have not in all the discoveries in the world, either in Parliament or outside, found any substitute for Trades Unions. We may use that power politically as an addition to the Union, but we must have as a base a strong Union if we want to have strong protection for our members.

INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS.

We had the evidence, as many of them were aware, at the Miners' Congress on the Continent a few weeks ago, of the strength of combination. I myself, along with my colleagues felt proud of the work which had been going on for sixteen or seventeen years. When the Miners' Federation, allied with our friends from the North, first took up the question of an International Miners' Federation, we were laughed at by many people who thought of the difficulties as to the difference in language and nationality, but the Unions here, believing that we should have greater protection and security in wages and hours if we could only bring the Continent into line, took this in hand, and at the last International Congress there was most striking testimony to the influence of this great movement as Delegate after Delegate rose to his feet, whether speaking for France, Germany, Belgium, or Austria, a statement was given, clear and emphatic, slow it is true, that considerable headway had been made by all with regard to the shortening of hours of work and other conditions, and they all bore testimony to the better conditions then existing from sixteen or seventeen years ago. This, in itself, is an encouragement to us to see that we relax none of our efforts. Then, again, the bogey of foreign competition by Great Britain, we heard so much about, has been largely allayed by this international fellowship, and I hope that

I shall live long enough to see a much greater result of the goodness which must arise, beyond that which has already arisen, through the co-operation of these nationalities. At any rate we are laying a truer foundation, than many people who have travelled abroad, to seek to cement the good fellowship between all these nationalities spoken of, and so far as war and strikes is concerned these things will be largely laid through the explanations we are giving to men of all nationalities that the battle of life is common to all, and that we must have some regard for one another. If we can do this, then, I think, we shall be the greatest missionaries and civilisers, as opposed to the spirit of war, opposed to the common desire for war, that have ever travelled on the Continent.

ACCIDENTS IN MINES.

We were reminded this morning by the resolutions passed that the calling that we represented here to-day is a serious one, and whatever might be done, and whatever has been done, and however it is managed, the human race as yet pays a solemn and heavy penalty for the production of coal. When you come to remember the enormous death roll that occurs in the ordinary cycle of time through accidents, from explosions and falls of roof and other more lesser accidents, it is appalling to think of the enormous price paid to-day in human life in mining industries, inspite of all the advantages of science. I am bound to say that the Government of this country has been good enough to recognise that this human slaughter should be resisted in some way or other, and in the appointment of their Commission they have thought to consult this great Federation for the first time in the experience of their great Union. Three members of their Union were represented on that Commission, and as they sat taking evidence after evidence, we felt that nothing but the downright cheerful optimism in our human nature would ever have persuaded men to go and toil with all this risk that lays about them. The object of the Federation must be to reduce this loss of life whatever is the cost. I am afraid that the question of cost is one of the factors that does prevent many things being done that might be done, but from our point of view the life of the workmen should be the first claim on the industry, whatever it costs. A mere extra cost per ton in the saving of human life is, to my mind, one of those things that a rich nation ought never to hesitate upon, and so far as we are concerned on the workmen's side, we must take good care not to hesitate, not to be frightened by the bogey of cost to secure greater immunity; that must be done.

COMPENSATION ACT.

Since we last met the Compensation Law has been put upon a better basis. We have been claiming for years compensation for injury, and we are beginning to realise some of our early dreams and hopes in this respect. The law regarding compensation is much

clearer, and the obligation to pay compensation is much broader than it was when we met twelve months ago. But, after all, the most valuable side of the measure which has been passed is in the greater protection it is likely to bring about to human life. As they had urged at Conferences, the most valuable side of it was not for the purpose of securing compensation, but that compensation must be paid for accidents which were unavoidable, and it will be a great pity if the payment of compensation leads to greater carelessness, to say nothing about recklessness, in the conduct of great concerns. I am sanguinely hopeful that the law will be made sufficiently stringent to prevent that.

TRADES DISPUTE BILL.

With regard to the Trades Dispute Bill, I shall not for my purpose in what I have got to say rake up the many sides of this question, but a solution has been found although great legal matters had been involved, and many of us felt if we could get a sound solution of the difficulty that in our hour of victory we could afford to be generous. Everybody knows it is a fact that the House of Commons adopted largely the view of the Trades Unions of this country. At any rate, the Trade Unionists won unmistakably a great victory in the settlement of that question in the Trades Dispute Bill, and I am one of those, looking on, saw that much of the sinews of war and of the needful force was given by the forty Labour Members inside that House.

EIGHT HOURS.

Now, during this next year you will have to debate your pet hobby. For many years the Eight Hours Bill has divided even the miners themselves, but, happily, we are becoming united upon it. Somehow or other, everybody was beginning to realise that eight hours was long enough for any man or lad to be in the pit; at least everybody who worked at it. Some people who had no knowledge, scarcely, were not so keen, and thought the men might work ten or twelve hours. The Government has gone the length of giving us a Bill, and I want to say here, that whilst the Bill does not meet our views, I think it affords us grounds for a settlement of this question; at any rate, the bank to bank principle is admitted and there is no contracting out of it. There are many points gained, but for ourselves there are some features which are objectionable, and when we get to the Committee Stage of it, then will be the time to inform the Government, however friendly it may be, that a Bill that contained some of the clauses this Bill contains will not meet with the general wishes of the miners of this country. What we have asked for over and over again is "Eight Hours from Bank to Bank," because we believe, on humanitarian grounds, that eight hours is long enough for a man or lad to be buried underground. I believe that people in discussing that question were apt to compare

other industries with ours, forgetting one fact that there is no other trade conducted under the same conditions as mining. There is no industry where a man is shut out from the world for so many hours of his life, day by day. On these grounds we shall stand to the principle, so far as I know, of eight hours from bank to bank, and shall be no party to longer hours or extra days. It reminds me very much of going in for short time and consenting to the principle of overtime. If it is a question of more wages, we had better go in for it without working overtime. We must have eight hours, and in working out this problem we have become too hysterical. I venture to say that with all our modern wealth and resources I do not think the world will suffer very much for the want of coal. At any rate, it will find employment for more men and help to solve the problem of the unemployed; while, with regard to the question of war, I do not want to appeal to the patriotism of the Delegates here, I might say, in the hour of invasion or national emergency, we should be prepared to work extra hours for the production of coal, but it is dangerous to say so. We are having none of it; it is to be eight hours clear pure and simple—eight hours from bank to bank. I am afraid that I am going away from notes and gone on longer than I ought to have done, but I am trying to remind you that I have great sympathy with any class that is trying to make this world like the heaven that lies beyond—to make it much better, and in doing it leave it much better for everybody.

OLD AGE PENSIONS.

The question of Old Age Pensions has been threshed out again and again, yet it does seem to be a matter as to how far off it is. It is a question of money—a question of cost. The only difference between people in this world is the question of money, and after all there are many fine and noble natures who have given their best services to the country to whom an old age pension would be a godsend. At any rate it would make the end of life a little smoother and easier for him, and he wants to be made to feel that he is existing not as a pauper, and when the great masses realise that fact for themselves working-men will not be left long outside. The scope of an old age pension, and, to my mind, we have got in some way to get round this question, and quickly too, because it is a standing scandal for a nation like ours that men who have worked for the community should have no provision made for old age, that a man who had no prospects but who had a good deal of manhood left in him did not care about the idea of ending his days in the workhouse. It is a blot on the escutcheon of this great country that places men through misfortune, and not through extravagance, who have found themselves at the end of their days that the depths of a river would mercifully cover up many of their agonies, and I venture to say it is a disgrace to a professed Christian nation to allow this to go on a day longer. Society can never fully realise

and never will what prosperity means in its truest sense, whilst those who create wealth, themselves are starving.

UNEMPLOYED.

Then the unemployed question was a thorny subject, and it seems to me that the Government ought not to be too thin skinned in dealing with this question. The unemployed question is responsible for creating loafers largely. How can you deal with a man unless you can find him work? This was a problem that often confronted me when sitting as Mayor of Burslem, how to deal with a man who has no home nor shelter. To my mind the State ought to direct itself to this question, and find work for a man who was anxious for work, and wants work, work should be found for him; but the man who will not work, and creates nothing and who does nothing, well, send him where we send all vagabonds. We in the House of Commons a party who is trying to deal with this question. I speak of a party in the broadest and truest sense.

LABOUR PARTY.

I know this Conference is a little divided on the question as to what is meant by a Labour Party, but it is not so serious after all. Those who have had experience of it have discovered that time is bringing about what everybody desires, and bringing it about in the way desired. I have always said from this chair that we shall get there with one complete party; we shall get there with one party and will do so without destroying the confidence of the great mass of men who form this Federation. The great thing needed is to lead men along lines that will not destroy the years of good you have been able to accomplish. This Federation, and all of us, have been anxious to feel that this Labour Party itself shall be free from what is commonly accepted as "party trammels." Not a man in this Conference feels this position keener than I do, and we have discovered that we are one in essence, one in effort, and one in unity with the trades represented in the House of Commons. The miners of this country are expected to, and will, march with the rest of the labour people on those great problems, the solution of which we all so desire. I, personally, feel very little respect for the man who seeks to burk or tries to hinder or destroy the possibility of all efforts for a friendly union with the great Labour Party. I know we have a lot of alarmist people in the world, who are afraid they are going too far; but, personally, let me say that I have greater faith in the human race who have achieved so much, and are not going to throw away to-morrow what has been won to-day. We have been working years and years, all sections and all societies, in order to make this old world look and feel better; and I do not know that anybody is prepared to throw any of it away. The struggling middle-class people have gained much, and the working-classes have had some benefit; they seem to have gained a living, but never a luxury; it has

been an existence, and at times poor enough; while to others in this long line of fighting regiment it has been a saddening business: and if anything we can do in this Federation to prove that we are not so selfish and not so clannish as to feel that the world was created for the miners, and for the miners alone, that in all the great questions that deal with the lives and happiness of this race, whether your old men, your small children, there will be no warmer advocates, there will be no warmer hearts to help than there are to be found in the Miners' Federation of Great Britain.
