
PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS.

The PRESIDENT: The next item on the Agenda is always an interesting one, particularly to the Chair, and I am usually happy when I get over it. Let me say that I welcome these 160 delegates to Edinburgh as President of this great Federation, greater year by year, greater in numbers, greater in strength, and shall I say greater in intelligence, always faithful I hope to this the greatest union of one class in this country, and I think outside. It gives me great pleasure when I remember that it was from this land of bonny Scotland that Mr. Macdonald many years ago commenced this great movement, and from this Scotland we have recently lost a very dear friend in Mr. J. Weir, who, year by year, laboured with us, and in the memory of the two men I welcome everybody connected with this Federation in this hall to Edinburgh.

CHANGES SINCE LAST MEETING IN SCOTLAND.

Since we met last time in Glasgow, in 1903, under the Presidency of our late friend, Mr. Pickard, many changes have taken place in this Federation, and in the mining community of Great Britain, and also since we met in this city in 1904, marked changes have taken place. It is in the memory of many of us that there were many aspects of those meetings that was sad and saddening to remember to-day. We call to mind that the policy pursued by this Federation was very little understood, the great principle for which we were contending was in its infancy, and Scotland was in rather an unfortunate position when we met in another room in this city. Our methods, then and now, the methods of conducting this great Union, our experience of what was likely to happen then and what was likely to happen in the days to come has rather

proved or demonstrated that the early Founders of this Federation had great faith in the Institution, if once understood, and at the base of it they had great faith in each other, and if we persevere that inside this Federation the faith and trust—common to the human race in this Federation—I have not much fear as to what can happen in the days that lie before us. When we met in Glasgow last, it was not the only meeting, there were many meetings besides ours. At that time our Federation numbered 350,000, to-day we had heard the Credential Committee's Report which gives 600,000. Of course, since that time our friends from Durham and Northumberland have joined with us, and the districts represented at Glasgow in 1904 has witnessed a remarkable increase in membership throughout Scotland, throughout Wales, and throughout the rest of England, a remarkable increase has been witnessed. When I contemplate this Great Union, so full of possibilities and equally full of responsibilities, I feel I shall be forgiven if I dwell for a few moments on the magnitude of this Great Organisation and its relation to each of us in the days that lie before us.

EIGHT HOURS QUESTION.

One of the first fruits of this great movement is the Eight Hours Act, and it is practically now in operation throughout Great Britain, a movement that has gone through many vicissitudes, and more than once the future for that movement looked very dark, and I think it has been evidenced we could not have got it through so smoothly had it not been for the fact that we were all members in one Federation, all members of one body. Now, at any rate, we have got what was thought to be impossible. We have a uniform system of hours throughout the coalfields of Great Britain. I do not know whether any of you have given any thought to it, but it does seem, to me, at any rate, having settled for some years this question of hours, it would be much easier to concentrate our forces on other aspects, because we have by no means exhausted the work of this great union, whilst the conditions we see around us are much better; yet they are not by any means the ideal this great Federation aimed at. Now that we have, at any rate, adjusted some of these enormous difficulties which laid around the question of hours, let me suggest from this platform that we had less difficulty than many expected. I think, if we give a moment's thought and consideration to it, we shall all realise the enormous difficulties and possibilities of it, and had it not been for the strength of great unions the differences and trouble must have been more acute than they have been. I think all of us here will feel this morning great pleasure in seeing our friends from the North with us, who have had the sharpest brunt of the battle to face, and they are here this morning with us having passed through a rather critical crisis. They are here with their union as strong and as consistent to the principles of this Federation as they have ever been at any time in the history of this Federation.

CONCILIATION.

In moving forward together—and here I touch on ground that will be common to all—we are expecting to move forward together, and in doing so we shall run against one of the problems that is puzzling the world just for the moment—how best to adjust the relations between employers and workmen. The best way to settle differences as between one and the other will, I think, be generally agreed in this conference. That it is much better if you could do it by conciliation. It is much better if you can argue it out across the table, and you have a much better chance of arguing across the table now than twenty years ago. The principle of conciliation is new. I prefer the term conciliation. I am not so enamoured of the term arbitration. I like best where the two interests can fight out its difficulties in that way. I want to suggest it does seem to be a sad reflection on the intelligence of this Conference, on the intelligence of this great Federation, and the intelligence outside this Federation, and on the general commonsense of all men, leaders of men, the men themselves and employers, if these great difficulties and differences could not be settled without strife, and strike, and stoppage, and warfare of that kind.

QUESTION OF PEACE.

The more we understand that question the more we feel how important it should be to preserve peace. I am satisfied now from long experience that no man can talk glibly about great strikes and stoppages; no man can do it if he realises the misery and the horror of it. Like in wars, the suffering is thrust upon those who are least able to bear it and who cannot help themselves, and it does become us as a great Union to do something, and let me say when a man preaches that there is a sort of crude feeling that a man is played out and has got too old, it seems to me to be the veriest nonsense and rubbish to say a man is played out, when he pleads for any other way of accomplishing the purposes of a great Union other than by strikes, chaos, and strife from one end of the country to the other. I notice with sorrow that people outside who did not carry the burden of this Great Federation, who did not carry the burden of what we have got to face, treated this as a power that might be used for any conceivable sort of purpose. I want to say as a Federation we have hardly yet developed that far. The first ideal underlying the principles, purposes, and objects of this Federation is to make the general conditions of its members better, and along those lines we shall go to make the conditions of everybody better. Of course, its great strength will always be thrown in with all other great movements tending to the uplifting of the human race.

ACCIDENTS AND CHEAP LABOUR.

Turning from that for the moment as to what has happened since the last Annual Conference, and what many of us suggested

with regard to accidents and the awful slaughter of men. With regard to Whitehaven, I think it is on these lines where all the strength and force of this great Union might be exercised to stamp out, to prevent, to reduce, and if possible to avoid altogether such calamities as occurred in the neighbourhood of Whitehaven. What a tragedy? Which is renewed a second time to-day in the recovery of the bodies of those men, comrades in the same business. It does suggest from all sides there must be greater care both by the managers and by the men. The anxiety for cheap labour in certain quarters will have to be met. It was supposed in dealing with cutting coal by machinery that it can be done by a sort of rough and ready and tumble labour was sufficient. Is such kind of labour cheap? Is any sort of labour that lacks experience? Can it be cheap? I cannot view that in any such light as cheap labour. Is it less expensive taking the risk they have to take? During the boom men new to this work who had lived in the world thirty-five to forty years to be turned into this industry without much thought, without much consideration to the vast majority of people engaged in the trade, and it does seem to me that it is important to the employers and workmen on both sides, that it is important that we should seek to bring home the desirability of some sort of training for men who are called upon to follow this occupation. We may not be able to close the door to all men after the age of 18 or 20; we may not be able to close the door against men after 30 or 40 years of age, but we do suggest in all seriousness that the time has come when more care should be given to the employment of men who have had no experience to be taken into the mines not to their own risk alone, but to the risk of scores and hundreds of men engaged in these collieries where they may be employed. I am inclined to think that the stream of young life coming up in our collieries if treated fairly, if treated by the employers properly, will be able to supply what is required in the development of this particular industry, and they will therefore have a training in the knowledge and dangers and experience of it, and above all I would like to urge, in these days of technical education, in all our colliery villages that a little of the money—the enormous amount of money spent on education—some of it might be spent on directing the minds of the growing youths who were to follow this industry as to what are the main salient features of the dangers in the mine, thereby giving to these lads a training that will fit them for their duties day by day, and make them better citizens, better men, and have a fuller knowledge of the dangers that lie around them.

QUESTION OF INSPECTIONS.

Then I think the steps we have taken in urging upon the Government for increased inspection is a matter that ought not to be treated lightly or lost sight of. More inspections, a fuller inspection, a more complete inspection. We have suggested a new

type of inspector. I am sorry that our view of it has not been accepted, not so readily, or has not been accepted in the spirit in which it has been offered by those who were fostering and encouraging this idea of working men inspectors. We have never suggested men being appointed who were ignorant of the ordinary duties of an inspector. We have never suggested that a man should be appointed simply because he was a working man, but that he must have a knowledge of the particular duties he would be called upon to fulfil, and the dangers surrounding it. We suggest that there are men in all districts who have given evidence, men who have followed every form of labour in a pit from boyhood and have given evidence before the Examiners of their fitness to manage, and if such a staff of men were appointed throughout this country, the money spent in this direction would be well spent by sending these men into the districts, who not only have the experience of the duties but who have been trained in a pit all their lives, this is the type of men we suggest. I do not want to say a word derogatory of the class of inspectors we have with us, what we are asking for is a type of inspector that will be seen more in the pit, seen oftener in the pit, and will stay longer in the pit, and know something about the ordinary difficulties of the ordinary workman. This is a question that this Conference might direct their attention to very profitably, because I cannot conceive anything more ennobling, any higher function, that any body of men could fulfil than that of seeking to reduce this terrific death-roll, and seeking to save human life. He ought to be, he must be the true saviour in its truest sense, the sense of saving men from death by more care and yea, by the expense of a little more money which ought not to stand in the way, where the money is so important, for that class of work.

STRENGTH AND OBJECTS OF UNIONS.

Then you have the wages questions to deal with from time to time, in settling price lists from time to time, always taking care to use all the strength of the Union, experience and guidance in dealing with these matters, and in any great epoch where it is seen the workmen are unfairly launched, in any great epoch where large bodies of men are unfairly treated, they will always have the backbone of this great Federation to rely on. I want you to realise here, strong in our own strength, we will use it as strong men, as wise men, so that out of it there might come to their membership—whether in Scotland, England, or Wales—brighter, happier, and better conditions. For several years we have tried to premeate the Continent with this doctrine, and I am now proclaiming it from this platform. We have seen a steady quiet growth during the last 20 years, we have all realised the community of interests that lie between us, the interests between the miners of the Continent and between ourselves. They realised that the struggle was a common one and the end is all the same, and while we have heard many

dreadful things in these days as to the purpose and object and aims of these Trades Unions, I think everybody understands all we have been after all these years, and what we are after still is to realise in our lifetime, or leave as a legacy to our children, a better, a healthier, a happier Fatherland to live in than when we came into it. That is the object and purpose of this great Union, and it will bend itself at all times to that end.

OSBORNE JUDGMENT.

It has been suggested to me that I might say something about the state of the Law with regard to what is so important to everybody just now, as revealed in the Osborne decision. My reply to this is, we have had a Conference to deal with it and another Conference will be held to deal with the recent decision. I want to say that we are in complete agreement with all the other Trades in their action, in their efforts in the direction they have taken. We rather felt here, we preferred to do our own work in our own way. We rather preferred to feel our Trades Unions unfettered and untrammelled, and to do this work in our own way. I am voicing the views of our membership when I say, that whatever step is thought best in the interests of the Trades Unions of the country, we shall not only give our hearty support, but we shall be with them in the front in dealing with such an important question. I shall be excused dealing further with it, it does not arise on our Agenda, it will be dealt with at a Special Conference.

BUSINESS FOR CONFERENCE.

I want to suggest that in the Agenda we have work for this week that will require your attention and the attention of the Chair, and it will require smart business people if we are to get through. I deprecate long speeches if they can be avoided. I have a time sheet that I kept for Thursday, October 7th, last year, and we had 27 speakers between 10 past 10 and 1 o'clock. I wish to invite your attention to it. I am satisfied all of us here, however we view these questions, we are here mainly and solely to develop this Great Federation, although we may differ sometimes, and we may have misunderstandings, yet as I look from this platform, wherever men are engaged in dealing with, leading men because many of the men who are here are leaders of men in its truest sense wherever we are engaged in it let us live in an atmosphere above imputing things to other people because they do not see as we do. Let us carry on the work by using the material we have, and if we work on these lines the Conference will never regret holding this Conference in this beautiful City of Edinburgh.