

WAR.

The CHAIRMAN: Fellow delegates, you will notice from the Agenda what we have to do to-day, that is, to take reports from the various districts with regard to how they are affected by the war either industrially through lack of employment or by contributing to the national forces and distress arising from want of employment. Your Executive decided, as many other bodies have done, that in view of the serious state of matters arising out of the war we would postpone for the time being our Annual Conference. The feeling of your Executive was, that whilst you had many burning questions which would have justified, it may be, the holding of our Annual Conference it was felt that we were not likely to get the attention and the publicity which we naturally expected for an Annual Conference of such a body as this Federation, because public opinion is taken up pretty fully at the present time with the serious struggle through which we are passing. It was felt, however, that it was necessary that there should be a meeting called for the purpose of passing your Annual Balance Sheet, and for the Election of the Officials of the Federation, and that we might also take advantage of that to get all the information we possibly could as to how our people are being affected by the war, with a view, it may be, to assisting us to take our position side by side with the other labour forces in using the power of our organisations in endeavouring to get some of the wrongs at present existing arising out of the war put right. I am not called upon to-day as your President to deliver an Annual Conference address but I would like to say at the outset that I feel, that I am sure, this great Federation representative of such an enormous number of the industrial class of this country deeply regrets that this European War has broken out.

BELGIAN DEPUTATION.

We had to-day a pathetic reminder of the consequences of war. We had at the Executive Committee Meeting this forenoon a deputation of officials of certain grades of organised labour in Belgium, a deputation of five whose language we could not understand. We had to have an interpreter between them and us in putting their woes before us. They added to some extent to the information which we have already in our possession as to the terrible state to which that little nation of Belgium has been reduced, it having been the scene upon which practically the whole of the fighting has converged. They were here asking for any assistance which organised labour in this country could give to tide them over their present distress. There we have a great hive of industry such as Belgium was, which many of you know who have visited International Meetings, there we have that hive of industry practically turned into a shambles. Factories, workshops, mines, closed up; people hunted out of their homes, many of them sent into other countries as refugees; the trades union movement, the working class

of the country practically brought to the verge of starvation. While these delegates serve to remind us of the terrible nature of things caused by war, and while this Federation will not to-day, I hope while it cannot afford to deal with the question of the rights or the wrongs of the thing, as to who is right or who is wrong in the matter, the position gives us matter for thought. I may say that although we have a very considerable amount of trouble at home. Our isolated position here places us in a position that we can scarcely realise the terrible state of matters on the Continent where the war itself is going on. I feel sure that our whole-hearted sympathy will go out to those who are not only engaged in the war, but who are also rendered homeless through the war. While we can give our sympathy, and I have no doubt we will give practical sympathy in the shape of financial support so far as we are able to do so. We will open our homes here, even working class homes, and receive so far as our people can possibly do, and treat with kindness those driven out of their own country on the Continent.

EFFECTS OF WAR AT HOME.

We must also keep in mind that the war has brought home to our doors a state of matters which has made it necessary that we, in conjunction with organised labour generally, should keep our minds fixed on what is to be the best method of securing to our people during the continuation of this war the best possible conditions which can be provided for them. Personally, I am sure that this Conference, I think, will join with me in expressing our gratitude that up to the present time we have not suffered to any great extent, leaving out certain localities. We have not suffered to a very great extent as a result of the war. There are some mining districts which in all truth have suffered a great deal—the exporting counties especially have suffered very considerably; but while we have not up to the present time suffered to a very great extent industrially, there is every reason to believe that the longer the war is continued the more likelihood there is we shall have suffering in the industries of the country.

REPORTS AND POINTS FOR DISCUSSION.

We will ask the Conference to-day to report, in addition to the reports which have already been supplied officially to Mr. Ashton on the points asked for information, we ask for a further report to-day. I think also probably we might have a brief discussion on two or three important points. I believe I am right in saying that the mining community of Great Britain has probably given a larger contribution of men in proportion to their numbers than any industry in the country. We do not say that boastfully by any means. I only say that, in order to justify my position in calling

your attention to the need that there is for our discussing and taking action in endeavouring to make sure of two points. That the dependants of those who have gone to the front from the mining districts, as well as other districts, shall be reasonably well treated. And that those of our people who have gone to the front shall not be forgotten immediately the war is finished and that they shall not end their days either in begging or in the poorhouse, but having been called to the front or have offered themselves freely for what they believe to be in the interests of their country that they shall not only be made sure that their dependants shall be kept while they are there but that if they return maimed from the front or have the misfortune to lose their lives either by death on the battle field or death through disease, that their dependants shall be well looked after by the country. Now that is the justification we have for saying that the mining community has added very considerably to the battalions who are fighting the country's battles, and I hope that you will all agree with me that it is our duty to make it so, that those who are in the fighting line or preparing for the fighting line shall know that their dependants, children, wives, fathers or mothers if dependent upon them will be looked after.

INDUSTRIAL DISTRESS AT HOME.

It is also our duty to take some notice and interest in those who may not be in a position to go to the front but who may be thrown idle by industrial depression caused by the war, who with their wives and children may be brought face to face with poverty through no fault of their own, therefore it is our duty to direct our attention to the question of industrial distress caused by the war equally with those who are left by those who have gone to the front.

WHAT HAS ALREADY BEEN DONE.

I regret to say that up to the present time, to a very large extent, both of these questions have been approached in rather a parochial and cheese-paring way by the Government and perhaps worse by those who claim the right to take action on matters of this kind. It is usually at these times that we find it is the easy middle class blanket distributing people who have claimed the right to be the authority for the distribution of these things, who know nothing of the distress and the necessities. I say it is a shame and a disgrace to the country that on the Committees appointed in certain parts for this purpose, the working class element has been neglected, in fact, the only people who know what poverty in the home requires, in some districts have been left off the representation of the Committees, and that to a very great extent is our own fault. In many cases public meetings were called and our people have

neglected to attend, but you will find the other people never neglect things of this kind, they are always there and the position is largely left in their hands.

WHAT SHOULD BE DONE FOR SOLDIERS, ETC.

Now these things will be discussed by us to-day and this is my only justification for indulging in these opening remarks. I feel sure that if we begin to discuss very closely the details we may differ very widely but we might discuss here some main points. I would think we should be at it for six months if we went into details, but what we might come to an agreement upon is perhaps the principles having in them what I have sketched out here to-day. The right of the relatives of those at the front to live as well as before the bread-winner went away. The right of our people when they return maimed to be treated by the Government to a pension which will keep them in decency and comfort, the right of those who lose the bread winner altogether to a pension.

WORKMEN'S COMPENSATION ACT AND ARMY ORDERS.

This agitation must be set on foot and must be pushed vigorously forward. We do not want mere promises that the Workmen's Compensation Act may be put into operation so far as the soldiers and sailors are concerned. A promise of that kind may be misleading. A promise of that kind may mean that the Government are willing to extend the Workmen's Compensation Act to soldiers and sailors, but if they do it would only mean that the soldiers and sailors families would be treated in accordance with the Workmen's Compensation Act. The Government, for the time being, being the employer, they would only get half of the wages earned by the soldiers or sailors. I do not think we could agree; our people must be treated at least in a reasonable way. They are doing what they conceive to be their duty, and when they come back maimed proper provision should be made for them by legislative enactment and not left to the army orders, which up to the present only give to a disabled soldier or sailor anything from 6d. to 1s. 2d. per day pension. When a man comes back disabled we do not want that.

PROCEDURE OF BUSINESS.

Now these are some of the points upon which we might have a discussion, and then you might remit to the Executive Committee the duty of endeavouring to draw up some resolution which the Conference could be unanimous. I am not sure that we shall be able to finish our business to-day. You will require to pass the Balance Sheet and the Auditors' Report. Then we shall have the Elections. I think we had better have a report from districts first of all on the questions sent out by Mr. Ashton.

He has asked me to take reports on this question, as the Auditors are going through finally their Balance Sheet in order to give a report, and when they are ready to take up the Balance Sheet we can do so and finish it. Then we can take the Election of the Officials, and finally we will have a discussion on the points which I have mentioned here, and if we cannot settle them here to-day we might require to meet again to-morrow. Personally, I do not think we can give adequate consideration to the business we have before us in one-and-a-half or two hours which we have at our disposal this afternoon. I would personally prefer, unless it is inconvenient to the delegates, to go as far as possible to-day and discuss the points of principle I have named and then adjourn until to-morrow afternoon and give the Executive an opportunity of meeting to-morrow morning, with a view of bringing in a final resolution. That is the course which I think we ought to take.

WELCOME TO CONFERENCE.

Before I sit down I want to welcome the delegates from the different parts of the Federation and especially those who may be with us for the first time. I well remember my first visit to London. I looked forward to it for days after being appointed as a district delegate, and when I came I remember how anxious I was to see as much of the city as possible, and in carrying my mind back I always feel that delegates coming here for the first time, while anxious to do the business for which they are sent, there will also be some excuse for the desire to see as much of the city as possible. At the present time it is not very enticing after four or five o'clock, all dark and dismal, and miserable. However, if we can make our business fit in I suggest that we should adjourn until to-morrow afternoon. I think now we might take reports and these reports will no doubt give rise to a discussion which will assist us very much in coming to a resolution.

I want to refer to the fact that our friend Mabon is still unable to be with us here to-day, but I understand that he has been improving in health for some time past and may ultimately be able to join us in the future. Mr. Stanley who has come through a very serious illness is still unable to be with us but we hope that the improvement may be maintained and that he will soon be alright.

We will take the Credential Committee first of all, then the Conference will be properly constituted.