
PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS.

WAR AND AGENDA.

The CHAIRMAN: I do not know whether it will be possible for you to hear my voice from the platform, but I do know that we are going to have considerable difficulty on the platform hearing the delegates. I do not know whether it is the acoustics of the hall that are bad, but I appeal to delegates when we come to discuss matters on the agenda, that they will speak as loudly as they would at a mass meeting so that we can hear what is being said. Now, on the agenda, you will notice that this year again Mr. Ashton has put down President's address. It is not easy at a time of this kind when our country is passing through probably the greatest crisis in its history, when we know that in many thousands of households, our own amongst others in the country, there is mourning for those who have lost their lives either in France, or Flanders, or the Dardanelles, and while the whole nation, and especially the parents of those who are fighting their country's battle, are worried and are practically giving their whole thought to that, it is not so easy for one to concentrate one's thoughts closely and entirely even on the labour movement.

LOSS SUSTAINED BY FEDERATION IN LEADERS.

We have to-day passed a resolution of regret at the death of Mr. Keir Hardie. Since our last Annual Conference we have lost by death a number of men who for many years have taken a prominent part in our own mining movement. Dr. John Wilson, of Durham, after a long and strenuous life has passed away. Mr. Tom Young, of the Midlands, who was well known to us, who was a quiet but still an active worker in his own district, has also

passed away, and I daresay that in most of our districts, a number of our local workers, the men on whom our movement really depends to a great extent, who have given of their best and have been called away. An extraordinary number of our people whom we have seen passing to the other side, along with them at a comparatively early age, there are a number of our people who may not have passed away altogether, but have been broken down in health and are unable to continue in the movement. Our dear friend, Mr. Albert Stanley, for instance, who has broken down in the work of our movement.

LABOUR LEADERS' STRENUOUS LIFE.

All this shows us that the worry and excitement of a labour agitator's life is not a bed of roses, that it is sometimes said to be. It is not merely obtaining the hard earned pence of the miners and giving nothing in return, it is, so far as I can see it, giving up your whole life practically to the cause in which you have embarked, giving up your life sometimes with the full knowledge that it will considerably shorten your days and not only will you get condemnation from those we call our opponents, at least with men on the other side, but very often blame and condemnation from our own people for whom we are working with a likelihood of a shortened life. I am sure, having already passed an expression of deep regret for those who have passed away, I feel sure that our sympathy goes out to those who through unavoidable causes are away, our sympathy goes out to Albert Stanley and his family in his illness, an illness which prevents him being with us to-day, and our deep sympathy goes out to our old friend—whom some of the delegates at this meeting may know and have met so long ago—that is our old friend Mr. Sam Woods, who has broken down in the terrible struggle on behalf of his class.

WAR AND RESPONSE TO APPEAL.

We are at the present time as a nation engaged in a most terrible international struggle that ever the world has seen, from every town and village not only in Great Britain or the United Kingdom but practically from every town and village in the Empire, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the Indies, and Africa even, a claim has gone forth asking the sons of the Empire to unite in the defence of its honour, and from every corner where there is a British possession the appeal has been met in the most extraordinary way. In our own island especially, from every town and village and hamlet our people in this peaceful country, in this country in which we kept a very small standing army, our people who were not a warlike people, who were not considered a warlike people, people who were considered a decadent people, have answered the call and have gone forth to defend their country and their country's flag.

MINERS' RESPONSE.

Our own industry has probably contributed the largest number, proportionately to our members, to any trade or industry in the country. Special efforts I think at recruiting have gone on in the mining districts, and from the point of view of the heads of the Army there is some reason, a reason well known to many of us that they believe in securing the miner, they have already secured a man whose muscles are as hard as wood with hard work; a man who does not require an extraordinary amount of training to make him fit for the privations of a campaign, a man also generally speaking whose whole life from early boyhood has brought him face to face with dangers almost as great as the battlefield. This being so, it is recognised that the miners make splendid soldiers, that the miners have proved they are not behind others in their patriotism and in their desire to do their share.

OUR MOVEMENT AND AFFECT ON WAR.

Having said that, I would like to say that some of us in this hall would not have believed two or three years ago that such a calamity could fall on the world or on Europe. We were going forward hopefully believing by national and international movement in connection with the trades union movement, and in the broader socialistic movement which we believed would ultimately, slowly it may be, but surely making it impossible to have a conflagration such as we have in Europe at the present time. I am afraid that we were too sanguine, but I am still convinced of this that labour will yet unite nationally and internationally and be sufficiently strong to prevent international war. Our movement would not be worth the sacrifice which is now being given to it, if we had not that hope before us, that labour will ultimately, although it has failed this time, will ultimately so unite in its own interests, in the interests of the peoples of all nations, not only in the interests of the world, but in the interests of humanity, we shall unite and be sufficiently strong to prevent international war.

PRESENT UNITY OF CAPITAL AND LABOUR.

This war has united or seems to have united in an extraordinary way the different classes of the State. I do not think the unity has the significance which some people say it has, or which some newspapers say it has. I do not believe the lion can readily lie down with the lamb unless the lamb is inside the lion. I do not think the interests of capital and labour are so happily united. It may for the moment be united in a common object in repelling what it believes to be an aggressor and an invader, but that does not in my opinion mean everything which is being claimed for it, it does not and will not bring the millennium. It may help in the meantime to see

us through this war, but this war is only a passing phase in the life of a nation and in the life of the world. It will pass away and we will again be back to the humdrum existence of industrial and capitalistic life.

POSITION .AFTER WAR.

It is necessary that we should keep up the strength of our labour movement; it is possible, and I think probable, that this struggle for fair conditions for labour in this country in a few years may be as intense as ever it has been. It may be as bitter in spite of the seeming unity for the moment of capital and labour, on a different object mind you, it may be as bitter as ever it has been in the past. Those who are spared to see that time will be glad if the momentary unity during the war, has given a more reasonable view to the employers of labour and to owners of capital, yet we will still require to have our organisation strong for the defence of our members; but if we did not require a strong organisation, those of us who see that time will be very well pleased, but we shall be foolish to slacken any efforts of ours to prepare ourselves at least for defending our interests in the future.

CONSCRIPTION (RESULT OF VOLUNTARY SYSTEM).

I would like to say a word about a matter arising out of the war, that is the agitation presently carried out for conscription which is being carried on in this country. This is no new thing. Some bodies of politicians in this country have urged for many many years during peace for conscription or national service. That agitation is now being renewed again with tenfold force, and renewed at a time when by voluntary means we have raised an army beyond the dreams of any conscriptionist of a few years ago—raised an army not merely in numbers, but an army of the finest stuff that ever went on a battlefield in any part of the world—an army of clean, hardy, courageous boys against whom no person in this country or abroad can point a finger and say they are weaklings brought up under the voluntary system. At such a time an agitation for conscription seems sadly out of place; an agitation for conscription at such a time without any authoritative statement from those who know best as to the needs of the nation at the present time.

INDUSTRIAL CONSCRIPTION.

Conscripting men for the Army alone would be bad enough in itself, but do any of you think that the money which is behind this movement, because the conscriptionist movement of the past few months could not have been carried out without hundreds of thousands of pounds behind it to push forward its realisation. Do you think this agitation has not been financed, and that it has on its side

a large body of capitalists and land owning opinions? Do you think it is to secure men for the Army? If you do you are sadly mistaken, the conscription campaign had behind it more than that. It has behind it conscription of industries, workshops, mines, and railways in this country. It has behind it the desire to set up what our lads believes they are fighting against, to establish here militarism as existed in Germany. I sincerely hope that we shall be strongly opposed to any attempt to establish militarism in this country. Under the Munitions Act you can see at the present time every day men called up here and there and being fined, sometimes for a very trivial fault indeed, with very little chance of defending themselves, but if we had the industrial militarism some people hope for we should have trials of our industrial classes and civilian classes behind closed doors without any opportunity being given to us to see and know what was going on. This should have our strongest opposition. Personally I feel that if conscription of the Army or conscription for munitions purposes or industrial purposes is required, it is not only people of the working classes who should be conscripted. I deny, and will fight as bitterly as I possibly can, the right of one class to conscript in the industrial movement my class, or to conscript for military purposes my class until they have first conscripted the land of the country and the capital of the country and put everything into it. These people talk of sacrifices; these people whose sacrifice is the giving away in income tax a very small moiety of their income, they speak of the working classes as not having sacrificed. Where is the home where the lads have gone away, or the father has gone away, that there is not a thousand fold more sacrifice than any wealth can give. Now when the bread winner goes away, or the lads leave father and mother and goes to the front they are sacrificing their all, their life. Was it too much to ask now at a time when money is one of those things we are told which will win this war, one of the chief things we are told, was it too much to ask that we should put our all into the melting pot, into a common centre, and if that is done there is no need for conscription; for in this country there would be such a rally of volunteers that there would be no need for conscription to fight any foreign foe. This requires to be watched, there is a division in the ranks of the members of the Government itself on this matter, there are men in the Government who were fighting conscription as strongly as they possibly could because they believed it was not required, in the first place, and that it would be wrong in the second place.

NEGOTIATIONS FOR PEACE — PRESIDENT'S ATTITUDE.

I do not wish to say a single word more, nor say a single word on which I think there need be any controversy in this meeting. One thing I would like to say, because I want my own position to be perfectly clear on this matter. I think I said at the Conference in Bristol. If I mistake not, we have talk at the present time of peace,

negotiations being opened for peace. Now, personally, as is well known here, I have always been a bitter opponent of militarism and war, I think it is a sign of barbarism. I think it is a remarkable thing at the present time when Christian nations of Europe, who have been professing Christianity for many years, are at each other's throats. Now I think this is not in keeping with the preaching of the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. I think it sinks Christianity down to a very low ebb indeed, to a lower ebb than my Christianity at least, when we find Christian nations linked with the Turks, the Turks who are wiping out the Armenian race chiefly because they are Christians; this shows us to what extent nations can sink when blood thirstiness and war gets hold of them. I do not think there is a likelihood of peace being secured so long as the Germans and Austrians are on French and Belgian soil. I feel even as a pacifist that it would be too much to expect our country in view of the sacrifices in blood and in treasure which we are making to lower itself, unless it is beaten down to the ground, to lower itself to even negotiate peace terms so long as the enemy is not on their own soil, but on the soil of France and Flanders. I felt it necessary to make that declaration, because perhaps some people might suffer blame if they did not let their position be absolutely known.

COST OF LIVING.

Now one outcome of the war has been the increase in the cost of living, and we some time ago put in a claim for increased wages on account of the cost of living having gone up to an extraordinary extent. We were met by arguments from the mine owners—arguments, I fear, which they themselves did not believe at the time, but which were put forward in their own defence irrespective of their truth. We got that agitation and we secured an increase in wages, which I think in no case met the real increase in the cost of living. If there was no doubt on the question of increased cost of living several months ago, surely there cannot be any doubt on the matter now. I find in the *Times* this morning, a newspaper which is not likely to overstate the matter, having gone fully into the cost in various towns of all the commodities which are most necessary in the homes of the worker, I find that they have put down that the increase in the cost of living since the war started amounts to forty per cent. It is true there is the addition of the bonus, but the so-called war bonus is a very small thing in some cases when worked out in pounds, shillings and pence. It is true in addition to that in many districts the miners have secured additional increases in wages because of the increased value of the material which they produce, but I do not think in any case we have secured anything like forty per cent., or anything like what would meet the increased cost of living, yet we are in a happy position as compared with the vast majority of workers in this country who have not been able to secure a penny. Think of the workers whose wages range from eighteen,

twenty, to twenty-four shillings per week, with house rents, rates, prices of food, price of coal especially, having gone up, and these poor people have no opportunity, no organisation, or any method of securing anything to meet the increased cost of living. What does it mean? It means where the mother finds with a steady, temperate father in the house, willing to work every day, the earnings which previously came into the house were insufficient to properly clothe and feed the children. What must it be now with the cost of living forty per cent. higher than it was then? Personally I feel that it was the duty of the nation to make preparations for cases of this kind. A very great part of the increased cost of living is going to swell the profits of the capitalistic classes in certain things, and I am sorry indeed that something has not been done and evidently nothing is to be done to protect these poor innocent victims against the exploiter, because the children of the poorer working classes we look forward to as the men and women of the future. Can we raise a strong healthy virile race under the present circumstances which these children are forced into? Indeed we cannot. It is the duty of the nation to make sure that the children will be fed, clothed, and protected, if they are to defend the nation at any time in the future.

INDUSTRIAL LEGISLATION.

Another outcome of the war is the sustained dearth of industrial legislation, the whole time of Parliament and the whole time of the Cabinet is taken up, and necessarily taken up, in looking after the country's interests in the present war, consequently, Parliament has not time, and we do not expect them during the present crisis to have much time, to devote to industrial legislation; but we have on our agenda this week many resolutions asking and pressing for reforms. It is our duty at least even during a crisis such as we are now going through, it is our duty to make sure that the Government will not lose sight of these great industrial legislative questions. It is our business to discuss them this week, calmly and deliberately, to give our reasons clearly and distinctly why we ask for legislation on the lines which we lay down, and while it would be wrong in us to press Parliament at the present time to give up any part of their time which is necessary in the other interests of the nation, it is our business to keep before them the fact that there are many legislative questions dealing especially with the safety of the miners which ought not to be lost sight of, and which we will not allow the Government to lose sight of.

OUTPUT OF COAL.

One thing more that I have already dealt with, and that you I believe have fully considered, but which I again wish to strongly

urge upon this Conference. You are aware that through the enlistment of so many persons from the mining industries, the output of the coal industry has suffered very very considerably, it is quite impossible to take away twenty-five per cent. or perhaps over twenty-five per cent. from the mines of the country, and these the strongest and best of the workers, and still expect that you will be able to continue to secure the output which you had previously. That perhaps is not expected, but it has been said that something might be done to keep the output at least at the highest possible point which these workers who are left can keep it at. I know that efforts have been made in that direction, that appeals have been made for more regular attendance at the collieries, that appeals have been made and will be made for the giving up of some of the customs applicable to some districts with regard to holidays and weekly or fortnightly idle days. I would like again to add my appeal to the appeal already made to that representative Conference in London to the appeal made by the Minister of Munitions and the Home Secretary to do everything in your power to keep up and increase the output of coal, and I again wish to emphasise this that I want the appeal to take effect largely on behalf of the poorer consumers of coal in this country. I know that the output will be sufficient to meet all the demands of the Navy. I know that the output will be sufficient to meet all the demands of the munitions manufacturers and most of our industries, because you may take it that these things will have the first claim on the output of the nation. I want to again call your attention, and the probability is you know as well as I do that with the limiting of the output of coal, that in spite of even the measure fixing up a particular price at four shillings per ton above pre-war prices; in spite of that legislation, the small consumers, the poor consumers of coal will again this winter be exploited as they were last winter. I put it here and now, and ask is it not a shame, is it not a disgrace to us, when the miners and mine owners jointly willingly acquiesce in the fixing up a certain point the price of coal at four shillings above pre-war prices, which means not only the limitation of the employers' profit, but it means more than that, it means where miners' wages are fixed according to the realised value of coal, it means also an interference with their wages. Is it fair and just that the miners or mine owners should be called upon to agree to a measure of this kind and are willing to do so, find that the Government allow the middleman, the exploiter, to come between the pit bank and the consumer of coal? I say it is a shame and a disgrace. At the present time in many cases coal is bought at the pit bank and within a few hours an increase of eight shillings or ten shillings per ton is put on before it reaches the real consumer. It is not business, it is not fair, and I think the Government should be told by the miners and mine owners who willingly, mark you, were prepared to make sacrifices that they are not prepared to allow the middlemen in the coal trade to come in between the consumer and the producer to exploit the poorest of the workers.

DISTRIBUTION OF COAL.

In the question of coal it ought to be the duty of the Government to deal with it. We think it would have been a good thing for the nation if the Government had taken over the mines and worked them during the war. I do not think the time has come to ask them, but surely it is not too much to ask the Government to come between the producer of coal and the consumer of coal, and take over the distribution of the coal in our great cities and sell it to our people at a reasonable charge after the mine owners have been paid. This appeal ought to be made again on behalf of the mining community and the people concerned in this matter.

WELCOME TO NOTTINGHAM.

In conclusion I welcome you to the town of Nottingham, and, so far as we can see, we are going to have a cold snap, but we may have nice bright bracing weather. I want you to do your work indoors while you are here and to enjoy yourselves by seeing the sights of this city, and if you can find time to see many of the beautiful places round about the city of Nottingham. You are within a very short distance of many historical places, many places closely connected with the early history of Nottingham, many places closely connected with the most early revolutionary movement of the workers against the exploitation of capital, and I feel sure that it will be in the interests of your health to have a run out into the country in the short time that you have at your disposal between times. I do not want to encourage you to leave the Conference to do that, but I do want you to take full advantage in order that you may have the free air to breathe and the free sunshine if you get time to do so, because up to the present time the air around Nottingham and the sunshine around Nottingham has not yet been commandeered by the capitalistic classes. It is still free to breathe and enjoy, if you can do so. However, I wish you to pay the fullest attention to the business which has to be transacted here this week, and especially do I wish you to join with the Officials in the consideration of the rules drawn up for a working alliance between the railway servants, the transport workers, and ourselves. The probability is, that this would have been a scrap of paper by this time, but we did not hold our ordinary Annual Conference last year. The railwaymen and the transport workers have already had their Annual Conference, and agreed to these proposals. We will have an opportunity this week of considering them, and considering also whether side by side with that there ought not to be a programme of reforms which we desire drawn up, with a view to having a programme for future united action between us. The promoters of this movement—the miners were the first to ask that something should be done to bring such a movement about—the promoters of this movement have not in their minds at the present time any great attempt at industrial revolution

in the country. They are only wishing for a closer connecting link between these three great cognate industries—the carrying industries and the mining industry.

ENTHUSIASM FOR FEDERATION AND OTHERS.

There is a great deal for us to do, and I want at this Annual Conference again to plead for enthusiasm, enthusiasm in the cause of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain. We have lost a very considerable number of members by death at the front, a great many of our members have gone to join the various forces. I think universally they are being kept in membership in the various organisations, so that our members are only being depleted by the death of the members who are killed, but are not depleted to the extent of the numbers who have joined the colours. It is true that our income may be depleted to that extent, but we are prepared to pay that side of the ledger, but we are keeping our people clear. I want enthusiasm amongst the rank and file of the delegates, the men who are here from the various districts, who are leading men in their districts, I want enthusiasm amongst you, so as to kindle enthusiasm amongst your comrades at home, and not only do I want enthusiasm on behalf of the Miners' Federation to keep its organisation strong, to keep it in the forefront, and to carry its banner high and carry it forward triumphantly. We cannot afford to simply kindle enthusiasm on behalf of our own organisation, but we must kindle enthusiasm on behalf of the workers to other organisations; and our enthusiasm ought to go further merely than our duty to the trades unions with which we are linked, or to which we are going to be linked up in the labour movement. Our enthusiasm must be kindled and kept alive for every good cause, for every cause that means the upraising of the mass of people of this country. Our enthusiasm must be kept alive and must be used on behalf of the children, on behalf of the women, and on behalf of the other sufferers who may not be organised and who may not have any organisation, and if we do this we can go forward hopefully and joyfully to the time when in this country we shall have real freedom and real happiness, and to a time when the nightmare of war shall be swept away altogether and when nations will be able to beautify their country and make their people happy and establish so far as possible a real heaven on earth.