
PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS.

WAR AND PEACE.

The CHAIRMAN : Ladies and gentlemen, you will notice that on the agenda the Secretary has put down the President for an address. I feel that it is rather difficult for one to be able to collect one's thoughts and concentrate on an address at such a time as this. We are again met together under the shadow of a great tragedy which is going on on the Continent of Europe. When we met last in Nottingham we had hopes, many of us, that before our next Annual Meeting came round that there would be a settlement of the strife which was then proceeding, but unfortunately this has not

been realised, and it is very difficult for us to concentrate our minds on our own business, important though it may be to us as a trade union. The question of the greatest importance, I take it, is that which is going on in France and Flanders and on the other fronts. I would like to again express the hope that long before another Annual Conference comes round that there will be peace proclaimed; a peace which will give us hope that never again in the history of the world will such a tragedy as this occur. It would not have been worth the blood and treasure that has been poured out if we secured a peace that is a patched up peace only, and which may in a few years land us again in a similar struggle. I sincerely hope that before many months are past that there will be a settlement of this terrible struggle which is bringing sorrow into so many homes in every country concerned.

WORK OF FEDERATION IN CONNECTION WITH OUTPUT.

The last nine months, since our Conference met at Nottingham has been rather a strenuous time for our Federation and for its Executive and Officials. We have been doing our best to protect so far as we possibly could the liberties which after years and years of struggle has been secured to our members. We have been doing everything in our power to carry out the pledge given in London, that, so far as the Miners' Executive and Delegates were concerned, they would do everything possible to secure the largest output of coal from the mines of this country. Personally, I want to say that I think that all the efforts in that direction have not been confined to the Executive Committee nor to the delegates. I think we are entitled to be proud of the fact that the rank and file of our organisation has done everything in their power to honourably carry out the pledge which we gave to the nation and the Government.

ATTENDANCE.

We have urged a better attendance of the men at the mines so as to get rid so far as possible of unnecessary absenteeism. We have urged our people to give up holidays, holidays which are very much prized by them; holidays which are very much required from a health point of view by our people. This is a sacrifice, not only to our members themselves, but a sacrifice to the women and children at home, who perhaps only once in a year get an opportunity of a few days from home with their little ones, and to a very great extent the sacrifice of our people, in giving up their holidays, has to be borne also by the women and children.

PRESS CRITICISM.

It is regrettable in view of the efforts the miners have made—I do not mean from the large number of men who have joined the Colours and gone to the front, but the efforts of their comrades

at home to keep the country supplied with coal—it is regrettable to see the unfair and unjust criticism that is sometimes to be met with in the Press and on the public platform. A few weeks ago I noticed a paragraph in an important Midland paper, from the London correspondent of that paper. It was dealing with the mines, and dealing with the output of coal and incidentally putting the blame for the diminished output and the higher prices, upon the miners. He pointed out that in the mining districts as on the Clyde there were pro-Germans at work to limit the output of coal and that the output of coal per pick had gone down in the British coal mines, and that generally speaking, the leaders of the men were doing what they could to limit the output. Now there never was a more outrageous and lying statement made than that. This statement is no more true about the miners than it was about the Clyde men, and on the Clyde it is absolutely false that anything of the kind suggested exists, and the same thing applies to the miners of this country and their leaders. There is no leader either national or local, who has in any way endeavoured to interfere with the highest possible output per man from the mines. There is scarcely a leader, national, county, or local, who has not been doing everything in their power to encourage men to get out the largest quantity of coal. The statistics of the Government itself prove that the output has gone up considerably, that it has gone up since the outbreak of war, therefore, it is regrettable that statements of that kind should be made by persons who either do not know what they are talking about, and consequently should not talk about it, or they do know and make these statements deliberately to try to mislead the public so far as the miners are concerned.

PREVENTION OF EXPLOSIONS.

Your Executive in addition to their efforts to improve the output of coal, have been undertaking at the same time some very interesting work in connection with the safety of the mining community. As you are aware experiments have been in progress for some time under the Government with a view to ascertaining how best to prevent the spread of explosions in mines. It is now fully recognised that the chief factor in the spread of explosions in mines is coal dust and consequently, the efforts of the Government and their experts have been turned in the direction of endeavouring to minimise the spread of explosions which unfortunately take place. Your Executive has been taking a keen interest, as was their duty, in the question of the limitation of explosions by some methods. The Government, or their experts, have found out from experiments, which we believe has proved now entirely the theory that existed for some time, that the spread of fine stone dust over the coal dust in the mines in the roadway would minimise, if not entirely prevent, the spread of explosions. Your Executive, having in mind the statistics which exist so far as mining in South Africa

is concerned, were particularly anxious that the cure of the disease should not be worse than the disease itself. They were anxious to have nothing that might destroy the lungs of our miners through inhaling injurious stone dust. They attended experiments at Eskmeals. They have gone down collieries where stone dusting and other experiments were being tried to deal with coal dust. Analyses have been made in different parts of the country and they are still considering the matter with a view to assisting the Government as far as they possibly can in their experimental work and of advising the Government also so far as they possibly can as to what the views of the miners are on this great question. I think your Executive would not be giving away a secret, but your Executive are convinced that we are making progress in the direction of the elimination altogether of the terrible explosions which have taken place underground in the past. The Government, we believe, will in a very short time, introduce—we hope with our approval—rules which will make our collieries in the future considerably safer than in the past.

WAGES.

We have had wages movements during the past twelve months. The price of coal has advanced, and in most of the districts, I think, in all of the districts, increases in wages, not uniform increases, but increases of one kind or another, have been given. From newspaper paragraphs one would be led to think that the rank and file of the miners of this country are rapidly becoming millionaires because of the many foolish paragraphs which are appearing in the newspapers as to the fabulous wages being earned by the mining community. Now, I think, it is true to say that wages generally speaking are higher now than they have been, it may be, at any time in our history, with the exception of 1870-71. I would like to say, and I speak with some authority on the matter, that in no mining district has the increase in wages kept pace with the

INCREASED COST OF LIVING.

In money probably wages are high, but when we realise from the Board of Trade figures that the sovereign of 1914 is only worth 12s. 4d., we come to realise how large an increase in wages had to be given to keep up with the increased cost of living. The Board of Trade has very carefully gone into the question of the increased cost of living, and I think we may take it that the Board of Trade is not likely to err on the side of being favourable to the workers, so that we may accept their figures as correct. Their figures prove that what it cost to keep a family of six persons previous to the outbreak of war was 25s. for the bare necessaries of the home, outside altogether from clothing, boots, rent, light or fire, and the 25s. of two years ago has become 40s. 6d. Now these are Board of Trade figures and cannot be denied. Now when one is dealing with

this subject, we are bound to ask this question, as to what is behind it all. The cost of living in this country cannot be because of the scarcity in the food supply or in the other necessities of life. We know because of the enormous increase in the cost of living it has made it almost impossible for hundreds of families to live, or exist, at the present time, and the direct cause has been the unjust exploitation by certain grades of capitalists, by the owners of ships in the first place, who have been the greatest sinners, and by hundreds of other capitalists who call themselves patriots, yet they have not hesitated to take advantage of the people's food in order to earn enormous profits out of the transaction. I, personally, feel that Dick Turpin and Tom King were gentlemen in comparison with many of those who have made themselves millionaires during the past two years. Those of you who are acquainted with the history as it is written of Dick Turpin and Tom King, are aware that they never robbed the poor, it was always the wealthy classes that they tried to meet on the King's highway, and after a friendly conversation with them relieved them of their purses, but they did not rob the poor. Our modern highwaymen, however, do not think about the poor, they have been robbing them right and left. There was something dignified about Turpin and King, because they knew they were running considerable risk in going out on the highway to rob these wealthy people, knowing if they were captured there was the end of a rope for them, and that was the end of it. But these modern highwaymen have no such danger awaiting them, they can rob without any fear of imprisonment or the end of a rope. Now, after all, they are not entirely to blame. I think the Government are more to blame for allowing such things, that these people really should have been robbing the people of this country through the increase in the cost of living.

OLD AGE PENSIONS.

There is one thing closely allied to this increased cost of living question that your Executive has paid some attention to during the past twelve months, that is trying to help that most helpless of all classes, the old age pensioner. Your Committee and the Conference which was called on this matter were particularly anxious that something should be done with the aged veterans of toil, men and women, who were in receipt of old age pensions. We went so far as meeting the Prime Minister on the question, asking him to use his persuasion on the Government to increase the old age pensions from 5s. to 7s. 6d. per week. At that time the cost of living had not increased to the same extent as it is to-day. The Prime Minister gave us indeed a very sympathetic reply, and pointed out that in his opinion a case had been made out for something being done on behalf of the old age pensioners, the difficulty would be in raising the necessary money to pay the pensions. We had considerable hope when we left the Prime Minister that within a very short period something would be done for these aged people. Now, the Chancellor

of the Exchequer is evidently the person who would require to provide the money, because when we met the Prime Minister we told him we did not want charity for these people; we did not want to pauperise them, and we did not want anything in the shape of charity. I want to read out to you the reply which was given in the House of Commons by Mr. McKenna to a question on the old age pensions as to whether or not anything could be done by the Government to augment the pension. This is the reply:—

“The difficulty between the two departments (the Local Government Board and the Treasury) is the following:—Any general increase of the rate of old age pensions would be a matter for the Treasury. I do not think a case is made out for a general increase of the 5s. per week. So far as the Treasury is concerned I shall not be prepared to recommend to the House any such increase, which would be enormously costly. It would be possible, of course, for old age pensioners to receive outdoor relief in addition to their old age pension, providing there was an amendment of the existing law, which disqualifies old age pensioners from receiving old age pensions if they are also in receipt of outdoor relief. An amendment of the law would have to be effected by a Bill introduced either by me or by my right honourable friend, the President of the Local Government Board. But the preliminary to the introduction of a Bill amending the law would be the production of satisfactory evidence that there is a real case for giving outdoor relief to any substantial number of old age pensioners. Upon that point I understand that the Local Government Board are satisfied that there is no real case. That is the whole of the difference or confusion between the responsibilities of the two departments. For my part it is quite impossible for me to say whether or not there is a case for local treatment, after inquiry, of individual old age pensioners. That is knowledge which comes within the province of the Local Government Board, and on which I have no knowledge at all. So far as the general all round increase of rate is concerned, I hope my honourable friend would not press any such proposal, which would be extremely controversial, and would throw upon the State a burden at a time when the State is burdened to the utmost of its powers.”

No case has been made out! The Board of Trade's schedule of figures which I have dealt with here just now, show that the cost of living has increased 62 per cent., that the sovereign (20s.) prior to the war is only now worth 12s. 4d., and that the old age pension of 5s. is not worth more than 2s. 10d. at the present time, and yet Mr. McKenna has the audacity to say that no case is made out for an increase in the old age pension. Mr. McKenna is aware, or ought to be aware, because the Local Government Board is aware, that hundreds of old age pensioners have given up their pensions and gone into the workhouses. Mr. McKenna ought to be aware, although he is not prepared to augment the 5s., that it costs on an

average 7s. 6d., 8s., and 9s., up to 10s. per week to keep these people in the workhouses. Mr. McKenna ought to be aware, if he is not aware, that many of these people are the grandmothers and grandfathers of those who are giving their lives and doing their best in other ways to save this country of ours at the present time. It is monstrous to say such a thing. Five shillings would not secure a decent lunch at a London restaurant for Mr. McKenna. It would cost the whole of the old age pension to give some of those gentlemen in the House of Commons their coffee and liquor and cigar when they get their dinner, and yet they say there is no case made out on behalf of these people. A case has been made out, but the case will never be recognised until the Government is forced to take it in hand. I want the miners to continue to champion this cause for the old age pensioners. We are getting letters. Mr. Ashton, and the other Officials, along with myself, get letters from aged miners, that efforts ought to be put forth on their behalf. I sincerely hope when the miners pass their resolution on the old age pension it will be unanimous, and that they will make up their mind that the Government must act on this question. We have already told the Prime Minister that we were speaking on behalf of the whole of the workers of this country, if an increase of old age pension to 7s. 6d. meant something like seven and a half million pounds per year, that the workers would bear their share of any increased taxation to meet that cost. Now why I want to speak strongly on this question is because I think the miners are unanimous in demanding that the Government must increase the pension of the aged poor.

TRIPLE ALLIANCE.

We have ultimately, after a considerable amount of discussion and consideration, at last formed the Triple Alliance, which is an alliance between the three great organisations, the transport workers, the railwaymen, and ourselves. We do not think that that will be the end. We do not think that these three organisations will be the final alliance. It is only the beginning, a beginning brought about by the miners on their suggestion. We have been engaged with other bodies in thinking of

AFTER WAR PROBLEMS.

We thought we were entitled to do so, because we believe that the miners, the railwaymen, and the transport workers have got a very large proportion of their members in His Majesty's Forces during the past two years. We know that because of the nature of employment in these three industries, that demobilisation after the war might be a serious matter indeed for the men employed in these industries, consequently we are going to approach the Government or its officials on the question of demobilisation after the war, in order to urge upon them that such arrangements should be made that there will not be enormous numbers of our members coming

back to be out of employment after the war, and that when our people do come back they must have secured to them either employment or at least State maintenance, until employment can be secured for them, and I think, because of the importance of these three organisations, there is every probability of us being able to get something done in the interests of our members who may come back from the front.

ORGANISATION OF ARMY.

ORGANISATION IN WAR AND PEACE TIMES.

Now there is a considerable amount of pride being taken, and I think deservedly so, in the enormous organisation that has taken place under Government auspices during the last two years. They have organised an enormous Army of nearly five million. They have organised the feeding, clothing, and equipping of this great body of men. They have organised millions of men and women into munitions works and engineering works of all kinds, and certainly the power which is able to organise such a state of matters as we have now organised within eighteen months is entitled to be proud of the nation that could be so organised, and while it has been necessary to organise for war purposes, we ought to remember, and I hope the Government will remember, that it is also necessary to organise in peace times, after peace has been proclaimed. A Government which is able to do what it has done in war time ought to be able to organise our nation in peace times. I think they are as entitled to organise for peace, for the happiness of the people in peace times, as they have organised for war.

AFTER THE WAR.

There is a serious danger of this war which is now being waged not being the worst war. The worst war may come after peace. Unless the workers of this country keep their eyes open when that day comes there may be two states of things in this country. There may be a state of things that we may get back to the old chaos of private ownership of the mines, of railways and land, and everything of that kind, with competition amongst ourselves brought about by starvation and unemployment, which would bring down wages to the lowest point, because in my opinion, the friendship which has sprung up during the war between the poorer people and the wealthy classes will all be forgotten after the war is over, and there may be a state of things which we can conceive brought about by starvation, or there may be a reorganisation of the whole State, there may be a reorganisation on national lines, everybody giving their labour freely, not for the purpose of profit to private individuals, but for the State itself. The Government to-day having organised for war as they have done, ought to consider it their business in the interest of the State itself to organise for peace in order to see that there shall be comfort for our people when the war is over, surely we will not

go on again allowing a small knot of people holding the land of this country and keeping it out of cultivation as they have kept it out of cultivation up to the present time. Surely miles and miles of most beautiful land of the country is not to be shut up for the sake of one or two individuals while there may be thousands of people starving for want of its cultivation. It will be the duty of the Government to make the best possible use of the land, and enable the people to get back to the land, from whom it has been taken. Terrible as the war is, costly as the war has been, I do not think it will take this country long to recover, and I believe that again we shall place ourselves in the forefront of civilisation. I sincerely hope that the workers will give this some thought, and that the workers will endeavour, so far as they possibly can, to make sure that in future our great country will be organised for the good of the mass of people rather than for the few. When I speak of the national ownership of the mines, railways, and land, I would like to try and keep in mind, that Government as now composed is chiefly in the hands of the capitalist class, and the idle class, and we might not be any better if the mines, land, and railways were nationalised. We believe that we shall require nationalisation in the fullest sense of the word in the British House of Commons so that the law may be made as it ought to be. These will be the problems of the future. In the meantime, all our energies are taken up or are being engaged in the terrible struggle now proceeding. I know that the Government is giving some thought to the reconstruction of our country after the war, and I think we shall be willing to join with the Government in any wise scheme which will really be for the reconstruction on proper lines of our nation which has for its object the well-being of the people, but we will, I feel sure, strenuously oppose anything which is merely a reconstruction on the lines of competition, and the lowest wages that the employers can secure to the workers, for that would be a sorry thing indeed for our lads who have shed their blood, for the women in the homes who have suffered during the last two years. It ought to be our endeavour to make this a happier and better nation than it was before we entered into this war.