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## PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS.

### WELCOME TO GLASGOW.

The CHAIRMAN: I regret to say that the Secretary insists on my opening the Conference with an address. In these strenuous times I do not think that any of us have got sufficient time to prepare an address, at least that is my position to-day. I want, however, to welcome the delegates of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain to Glasgow. You will say, and probably you will be right, that the City of Glasgow is not a place to come to if you want to see beauty from an architectural point of view, and we admit to a very very large extent that is true, but when you come to Glasgow you see we have a substantial city. You see a city, as unfortunately nearly all our large cities have, where you find the population divided into two classes, or perhaps we may say three, the wealthy and middle classes, and the poor. Generally speaking, you may take it that the workers of Glasgow live in the poorer localities. I venture to hold that most of the useful members of the community live in the poorest portion of the city. You will find not only a substantially built city, but you will find here a fairly strenuous population. We are a great industrial centre. You will find that there is little time taken off from business, either in business circles or amongst the workers. I think you will find a very kindly, hospitable people, and you will find in this city and the surroundings what to you ought to be of importance, a real live Labour movement, well organised and active on its political side. Then, if you have time during the week, you will have an opportunity, it may be, of taking advantage of our splendid car system to have a run out from the smoke of the city into some of the outside surroundings. If you get that opportunity you will find there are around Glasgow many beauties of landscape to gladden the eye a very short distance from the city. Well, I want on behalf of the miners of Scotland, and I think I might say on behalf of the industrial population of the West of Scotland, to give a hearty welcome to the representatives of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain.

## CONTROL OF THE MINES.

One thing which has taken place during the past year, which touches closely this Federation and its members, is the taking over by the Government the control of the mines of the country. You may know that again and again in previous Conferences we have urged that the Government should take over the nationalisation of the mines—that the mines of the country ought to be public property, owned by the nation and worked in the interests of the people rather than in the interests of private profit. We did hope in the early stages of the war the Government would take this step. The Government have not seen their way to take the step of nationalising the mines; they have only taken the step to take over the control of the output after it had left the mines. In taking control of the mines, I think it is just as well the Government leave the carrying out of the Mines Act, the safety, ventilation, and drainage of the mines in the hands of the present management and proprietors; that is nothing short of taking over the ownership of the mines would be satisfactory. Merely taking control of the output, I think, justifies them in leaving the management of the mines in the hands of the present owners. Personally, I must say that I would very much rather have seen the mines taken over altogether, not merely for the period of the war but for all time, so far as we are concerned; but it was necessary that something should be done by the Government in controlling the output. Last winter, and partially the winter before, there was a serious dearth of coal in many of the large industrial centres and large cities, and the very poor were forced into the position of paying a very high price for their coal, and in many cases indeed had to do without coal altogether. Well, if the Government, by controlling the output of coal, are going to make sure that there will be something like a fair distribution of coal, that at least will be something devoutly to be looked forward to by the poorer classes in our cities. In taking over the control of the mines the Government have had to enter into arrangements with the employers—with the owners of the mines—arrangements which up to the present time have not been made too clear so far as the general public is concerned. The understanding that we have got is in certain localities the mine owners will be secure in their pre-war profits whatever the selling price of coal may be, and that carries another thing, or did carry another thing, with it. It removes the general wages question from the higgling of the Conciliation Boards, puts the onus on to the Government of being responsible for the general wage rate of the miners, and one would be entitled, one would think it laid down that as partner—a most important partner may I say—in the mining movement that the miners are entitled, in view of the fact that the Government guarantees at least pre-war profits, we as another partner are surely entitled to claim, we also should be placed on at least an equal footing to the employers in this respect. Well, that point has not yet been raised. It has been suggested. It has been put before the Coal Control Board and the probability is that as the

outcome of the Conference this week the matter may ultimately have to be raised in an acute form. I do not think it is necessary to say more about this matter at the present period other than to say in view of the fact that the Government have taken over the control of the mines, they are particularly anxious so far as possible that anything which may arise that will probably lead to a stoppage of collieries or output, efforts may be made jointly in the first place to settle by negotiation any trouble that may arise, and failing that, the Coal Controller and his Board may have an opportunity of endeavouring to finally deal with the matter before an open rupture takes place. Well, I do not think that we, in view of the fact we had already given a pledge to the Government, will object to assist the Coal Controller in that direction always safeguarding anything in the shape of compulsory arbitration, or forcing us to arbitration if we do not wish to do so.

#### WAR.

Well, the war drags on its weary way bringing increased suffering and sorrow day by day, all this being borne with amazing patience and fortitude by our people.

#### INDUSTRIAL UNREST.

There has been during the war considerable industrial unrest, and it has been said in high places in the House of Commons and on public platforms that probably the chief cause of industrial unrest, which was not confined by any means to any one particular centre, that the chief cause of the unrest would not be found in the industry itself, but would probably be found in the fact that a number of persons, some of whom probably were paid by German gold were stirring up unnecessary strife between the employers and workmen. Some of us resented very very strongly a suggestion of this kind. Some of us have known all along the real reason for the unrest, and resented very much the suggestion that our people were striking or threatening to strike, merely because of the presence of agitators. The Government I think wisely appointed a short time ago Industrial Commissions, to go into a certain number of given localities and instructed them to at once make inquiries into the cause of industrial unrest. These Commissions have given their findings with a promptitude seldom found in things of that kind, and we find in an admirable summing up of the reports of the various Industrial Commissions made by Mr. George Barnes, that from beginning to end there is no suggestion made by any of the Commissions or Commissioners that agitators or German gold is the cause of any of the unrest. These people, I think, have gone fully into the matter. They have taken the evidence, and these Commissions, it must be remembered, had at least one employer, and they were very likely to find out if there were any just cause for the charges which have been made of agitators being the cause of the unrest. It has been found that there are other causes, which are briefly summarised by Mr. Barnes.

“High food prices in relation to wages, and unequal distribution of food.’ That is the first cause given, and you must remember that we have urged for two years that that was the chief cause of industrial unrest. ‘Restriction of personal freedom, and in particular the effects of the Munitions of War Act, workmen have been tied up to particular factories and have been unable to obtain wages in relation to their skill. In many cases the skilled man’s wage is less than the wage of the unskilled. Too much centralisation in London is reported.’ ‘Lack of confidence in the Government.’ That is the third cause given. ‘This is due to the surrender of trades union customs, and the feeling that promises as regards their restoration will not be kept. It has been emphasised by the omission to record changes of working conditions under Schedule 2 Article 7 of the Munitions of War Act.’ ‘Delay in settlement of disputes.’ That is another fruitful cause they say of industrial unrest. ‘Operation of the Military Service Acts.’ ‘Lack of housing in certain areas.’ ‘Restrictions on liquor.’ ‘This is marked in some areas.’ I am rather surprised that this has been put down as one of the causes of industrial unrest, and it is stated that this is marked in some areas. It is only fair to say that it applies to some areas only, and one can understand it considering the nature of the employment in some of the areas. Then, again, a most significant reason for industrial unrest is next given, and that is ‘industrial fatigue.’ This thing has got too little attention up to the present time. The stress and strain of the past two years in many industries has brought about industrial fatigue, and it is quite impossible for any person suffering from this that there can be industrial rest. The next cause is ‘Lack of proper organisation amongst the unions.’ ‘Lack of communal sense.’ This is noticeable in South Wales, because they have lost their faith in Parliamentary Representation.’ ‘Inconsiderate treatment of women, whose wages are sometimes as low as 13s. 0d. a week.’ ‘Delay in granting pensions to soldiers, especially those in Class W Reserve.’ ‘Raising of the limit of Income Tax exemptions.’ ‘The Workmen’s Compensation Act, the maximum of one pound weekly is now inadequate.’”

Now that is the list, and then Mr. Barnes summarises a list of suggestions, which I am not going to trouble you with here. We have got in this list causes which are sufficient justification for industrial unrest, which has been evinced in different parts of the country. I sincerely hope, now that the Government has their information first hand, not from agitators like myself, but from the Commissions appointed by themselves—Commissioners whom they could trust—I sincerely hope that if they want to allay industrial unrest that it will not be by admonishing the workers from the platform but by taking steps to get the grievances remedied.

## RUSSIAN UPHEAVAL.

Another thing which has taken place during this year is the amazing upheaval in Russia. The Russian people, governed for centuries by an autocratic Government, kept in a kind of serfdom worse than slavery. They had no freedom, either industrially or politically, and in which the Press were denied free circulation or the right of free publication. After suffering this for many years, and being considered the most dead part of Europe from the point of view of anything being done, the people of Russia have risen in revolution against their autocratic Government, and sent them to the rightabout. The Russian people were our allies in this war, and when the revolution was an accomplished fact and they had set up their own Provisional Government, they made up their minds that the aims of their own Government in the war had not been just aims, but certain claims had been made by their Government which they as a democracy, or a democratised people, could not support. They made up their minds that if they were going to continue the fight it would not be a war of Imperialism, that it would not be a war of aggression, and they decided if the war was to be continued there ought to be an attempt made to get the Allies with them in declaring that if the war was to continue it was to be a war not to set up Imperialism, not for annexations, and not for indemnities. They required the other Allies to come to the same conclusion. Personally I must say I believe the democracy of Russia was right in that. The democracy had no voice in establishing, I would say all Russia, the man in the street as we call the common people generally, never had any voice at all, neither control in Russia, of making or unmaking of war. We in this country as a free democracy had our voice and our right to a far greater extent than our brothers in Russia had, and when they realised their freedom they naturally resented the idea of their Czar and his rotten, treacherous, Government, and they were treacherous to their own Allies, they resented their claims to Constantinople, and other large slices of other people's property. In the revolution itself I was heart and soul with the Russian people, and I hoped they would establish a real democracy and a republican form of government. This has led to a serious state of matters in Russia, it has led to a serious state of matters so far as Russia's Allies in this war are concerned. Certainly things might have been better on the Western front if things had been different in Russia; but, I would like to point out, people are now saying that the Russian revolution and the democracy has already failed to justify its existence. I want to call your attention to the state of that country, in which the Government had denied to the people the right of education. A large number of the people—probably 95 per cent.—had no education in the sense that we speak of education, had had no opportunity of schooling or reading or anything of the kind. I think you will admit that you cannot expect a democracy all at once to spring from a nation that had for centuries been kept in that

condition, but they will, I believe, work out their own salvation. I have sufficient faith in them as a people, and the intelligence that was leading them as a people, to believe that they will ultimately work out not only their political emancipation, because this to us ought to be of more significance—a revolution does not merely mean a change of politicians, it does not merely mean a change in the form of government, but it will ultimately mean a change in the economic conditions of the people of Russia and in freeing the people from serfdom, as they had been up to now.

#### ENTRY OF AMERICA.

The entry of America into this world conflict is another rather significant thing so far as we can see. If the war is going on a long time it would seem as though practically the whole world, civilised or uncivilised, will ultimately be in it. This great democracy of America, after making many attempts to endeavour to secure something on which peace negotiations might be opened out, were forced through their President to declare—by the action of the Central Powers in the use of their submarine power—were forced to declare war, and they have now entered into this great conflict. Well, one would hope that if America as a free and enlightened democracy, which it always proclaimed itself, that it will be a force when the time comes for the peace settlement—it will be a force in using its power and its voice in endeavouring to establish not only the lasting peace of the world, but will make conditions which will make international strife impossible in the future, and will perhaps help the democracies of all the European countries, which I hope will have a voice in any peace settlement—will help them in endeavouring to make sure that internally the peoples of Europe may never again be reduced to the state industrially which they have suffered in the past.

#### INCREASED COST OF LIVING.

I would like briefly just to say a few words on the increased cost of living. The miners have taken a fairly active part in endeavouring to secure that the cost of living would not reach a point or be brought to a point which would bring hunger and starvation in the homes of the very poor. On the agenda this week one of the most important subjects to be dealt with is the question of asking for a substantial increase in wages for the whole of the British coalfield, I take it in order to some extent recompense you for the increased cost of living. I have little hope that any increase adequate will be secured. I have no hope that any increase of wages will be secured which will be adequate to meet the increased cost of living. I am one of those who believe, and I think our Miners' Federation agree and its delegates agree with me in this, that the miners are not discussing this week a claim for an increase in wages from a selfish point of view. We recognise that because we are

powerful and well organised, because of the importance of our industry we could, at any time we cared, force an increase in wages. We know we have the power, but we are not desirous of using it during the present crisis. We have abstained either locally or generally from using that power to enforce from the nation or from the employers or from the Government any unreasonable claim. We recognise that supposing we were able, supposing with the other important branches of organised labour we were able to improve our wages conditions even up to the point that would meet the increased cost of living that would only be rendering our fellow-workers in hundreds of other industries worse off than before, because the cost of living continues to go up to the point of the wages increase and doubtless the people outside our movement would be worse off, because of the advantage which we secured. We have no desire to do this, we would prefer that the cost of living should come down rather than wages should go up. Our claim is a belated claim. It ought to be remembered in many of our districts in spite of the fact that we have been called agitators, in many of our districts individuals in this room have been doing everything in their power to hold back their people in the claim for an advance of wages. They may be securing unpopularity in endeavouring to keep our people from forcing the pace on the wages question, and put forward a claim for increased wages. We had something bigger in our minds, we have urged this, that one of two things must happen, that the cost of living must be reduced, considerably reduced, or the wages of our class must go up to meet the increased cost of living. I certainly hope whatever the Press may think it necessary to keep out, and I think I am speaking for the men on this question, and for most of your colleagues at home, whatever the Press may feel it necessary in the public interests to keep out, I sincerely hope this warning of mine will be published, so that we may not be blamed for doing anything in a hurry or taking the Government unawares. Would you allow me to just deal very briefly with one or two reasons for the increased cost of living. It has been pointed out it is because of a world shortage of food, a world shortage of other commodities, but there is absolutely no proof in the statement that the cost of food has gone up because of a world shortage, and it is not even absolutely true to say that the cost of living has gone up very extensively because of a shortage in this country, not even in this country. There are many reasons why the cost of living has gone up so seriously. One of the important reasons is the enormous freightage, the increase in the cost of freightage in our shipping. Our patriotic shipowners gloried in the fact of our glorious British Navy, and our glorious lads of our Navy, because the Navy like the Army is composed of 90 per cent. of our class, and these brave lads have faced dangers on every sea, and they have stopped German warships and German mercantile marine, and they have left a free passage for our own ships to carry food, and it is in carrying merchandise where these patriotic shipowners have taken advantage of the fact that our Navy has made it impossible for the Germans to attack them until the

submarines started to take advantage. They started to take advantage by raising the freights 10, 15, and 25 per cent., and in some cases it has raised a hundred fold, and freights were raised from 10s. up to £5 a ton, and our Government has allowed this kind of thing to go on. Our Government commandeered a very considerable amount of shipping, and our Government has allowed private shipping owners to run the ships they had commandeered, and charged these enormous freights. The shipowners who have made so many millions have not been the only sinners in this respect. Our middlemen at home, through whose hands the commodities on which we depend for life have to pass, have gambled with them. Commodities that had to go to the working class home have been bought and sold on five and six occasions between the producer and the consumer, and fortunes have been made not by buying and selling as between producer and consumer, but by gambling between themselves, and two or three fortunes made. The Government ought to have prevented a thing of that kind. A Government that could organise such an Army that had been armed and munitioned ought to have been able to have organised the food supply, and managed to secure, generally speaking, cheaper rates amongst the workers. They ought to have been able to organise this, even supposing it was a gallows, in order to stop this thing. You will be aware, if you read carefully the figures which were given by Mr. Bonar Law, that we ought to thank him for the exposure of the shipping companies. He declared that he had fifteen investments in various small shipping companies, amounting to in all £8,100, and at 5 per cent. (a fair rate of interest) this would produce £405 per year. In 1915, however, he received in interest no less than £3,624; in 1916 he received £3,847. One of the ships in which he had £200 invested was sunk, and as his share of the insurance recovered he received more than a thousand pounds. Another investment of £350 brought him a return of £1,050. In two years he made a profit of £9,520 on a capital of £8,100, or, in other words, he got all his money back plus a profit of £1,421, and he still owns £7,900, which is steadily earning more profits. Mr. Bonar Law may be unsuccessful as a commercial man, but yet he was receiving money that the children's food was paying in increased food prices. Now, the shipping owners were not the only people who were in this deal. There are one or two figures that I will give to you which may be of interest. Some of us will be addressing meetings next week on the food prices, and, so far as part of Scotland is concerned, it may be well that some of these figures may be secured. At a recent meeting of Messrs. Lipton Limited, the Deputy-Chairman was able to announce a trading profit of £441,184. He declared this to be the highest recorded in the history of the Company. Despite the fact that they had to overcome unprecedented difficulties in trading owing to war conditions, a profit of £258,530 remained to be carried forward to the balance sheet; in other words they had more than doubled their last year's profit, which at a cost gives an increase of less than one-twelfth of last year's expenses. Then the Burma Oil Company whose headquarters are

in Glasgow showed a trading profit in 1915 of £991,700 and this rose in 1916 to £1,428,600. Ordinary dividends free of income tax were paid for 1916 to the extent of £571,500 at the rate of 30 per cent. Mr. John T. Cargill, Chairman of the Company said at a recent annual meeting of the shareholders: "I find myself to-day in the happy position of dealing with a report of accounts which easily constitutes a record in the wonderfully prosperous career of the Company." The Shell Transport and Trading Company for 1916 brought forward £420,302 and showed a credit to the profit and loss account of £2,126,146. There was available for distribution £1,979,400 and a dividend for the year was declared at 35 per cent. Two years ago the Indo-China Navigation Company was allowed to transfer its domicile to Hong Kong, it was allowed by the transference of its domicile to Hong Kong to escape the special war tax imposed by this country. In 1914 the profit of the Company stood at £14,500; in 1915 it rose to £119,100; in 1916 it rose to £312,200, and the dividend on the ordinary shares has advanced from 16 per cent. to 50 per cent., and these patriots removed their headquarters to Hong Kong in order to get rid of the income tax. None of us have removed our headquarters to get rid of the income tax. I do not however want to weary you with any further figures other than to say that the War Emergency Committee are issuing leaflets on these matters which will be of great interest to the workers in the near future.

#### UNREST IN THE ARMY.

May I say when the Government appointed a Commission to inquire into industrial unrest I personally felt that there might be appointed a democratic Commission or more than one to inquire into the unrest in the rank and file in the British Army. You have a resolution down here from Lancashire dealing with the soldiers especially when they are discharged as unfit dealing to some extent with the question of dependents, because you must remember every time the exploiters put up the cost of living it is not only put up to the wage earner who may secure higher wages but to the women and children of our soldiers whose allowances are fixed, and who cannot get any more, and who have been very well bled already by the separation allowances by the profiteers, and they cannot keep up with the increased cost of food, and it has brought it home into every house where there are soldiers' mothers, or wives and children dependent. Something is to be done this week for our soldiers, and there is one thing perhaps which I think ought to be dealt with. We have a proposal to ask for an advance in wages in view of the fact of the increased cost of living, and up to now you have been able to get substantial increases in wages in some degree to meet the increased cost of living; you must remember that these lads who got from say 9s., 10s., or 12s. a day, many of them who had volunteered to go to the front for 1s. 1d., giving up prosperous

positions at home, and prosperous happy homes, and in many cases go out there for 1s. 1d., 3s. 6d. of their weekly earnings going to the wife to keep the home, and they are spending 2d. or 3d. or about 6d. a day to meet their necessary needs in the shape of food, because they get insufficient food in the Army. They have not got an increase of wage, and is it not time that the democracy of this country was seeing to it that something should be done? I feel sure there is industrial unrest in the Army against the conditions that are existing, against the shortage of food, in many cases people suffering, and because of the unnecessary brutal treatment our people are suffering from at the present time. I believe there are thousands of men who never could be accused of being agitators who are complaining about the conditions, it is not confined to a few, and it would be a calamity if it came to a head, but it ought not to be suppressed, it ought to be inquired into and something done to allay that unrest. I want for a moment, while I touch on our own rank and file, our own splendid fellows who rallied to the colours, for the best and highest of motives they believed, to defend their country, to defend the smaller nationalities, no higher motive could have rallied them to the flag. I want to point out that the people do not receive the same treatment, it depends on your rank—the higher you get the better your treatment, the lower you get down the worse you are treated. It has been evidently forgotten up to the present time that this Army of ours is not of the low standard of a few years ago; this Army of ours is an Army of men highly intelligent, well educated, generally speaking, and they ought not to be treated as brute beasts as many of them are being treated.

#### MESOPOTAMIA.

I want, even at the risk of being thought out of place, to call attention to the fact that an inquiry was set up by the Government—or a Government inquiry was set up—to inquire into the situation which arose in Mesopotamia, where so many thousands of our people were done to death, shamefully done to death by miscalculations, mistakes, and culpable neglect. The report brings it home to those who were charged with dereliction of duty, with carelessness and culpable neglect. Now, we have heard of boys of nineteen or twenty-one who may have become worn out in time by marching and standing in the trenches, and fallen asleep and for a moment neglected their duties; they have been shot. The rules of the Army may be necessary to be carried out strictly, because a mistake might mean the loss of a whole battalion or regiment. I do not say anything for the moment about that, but if it is right in the case of a private, it ought to be right in the case of a civil lord. When the House of Commons demanded justice, the Government have even refused to ask for the resignation of Lord Hardinge, or that any punishment will be meted out to the other culprits. How can you have rest in the country under such conditions? I do not think that

the Labour movement of this country ought to lie down under that. How can you trust a Government, or even the King, which allows one man to be treated in one way and another in another way merely because of a difference in rank? How can you have faith in anybody when two men are treated differently because of the difference in social standing? Mr. A. Balfour is a loyal trades unionist—he sticks like a leech to his own class; he is prepared to do anything to protect his own class, and he has said that “if you continue the thing any further I will resign.” The nation ought not to allow injustice to be done, supposing Mr. Balfour resigned. We ought not to allow it to rest; we ought to force the Government to deal with these people.

#### BUSINESS ON THE AGENDA

I want to ask your assistance this week. There may be questions arising on which there will be a keen difference of opinion existing between us. I do not think, however, there are on the agenda this week many questions on which there can be any serious controversy, with the exception of one or two, on which there will be a serious difference of opinion. There is not much on the agenda which ought to give rise to any serious disagreement. The other questions on which we are likely to agree unanimously are very important questions. I do not wish to minimise them but there are very few on which we are likely to have a strong difference of opinion, but you have cut into the week by adjourning a day. I do not object to that but in return for that I ask you to devote as fully as possible the time at our disposal to the agenda. If you do, I will endeavour to get through the business. I would not like it to be said by our people that we had taken a day for pleasure and neglected any question on the agenda, because every question there is most important. I will with your assistance endeavour to finish the agenda without unnecessarily curtailing the discussion. Mr. Ashton reminds me of a very serious dereliction of duty on my part, that I have not mentioned the death of Alderman House, the Vice-President. I sincerely hope I am not to blame but it was want of thought that I did not mention it at the outset. I will, however, ask when I have finished someone to move an expression of our regret that Mr. House, who was in the movement for so many years, has been called away to his rest. I need not say a single word at the moment to justify me in asking this Conference to join in expressing our deep regret. I can only say that so far as I knew him, and before I knew anything about him he did seem to have a rough exterior, but I believe when you got to the bottom of the man he was one of the most kindly men I ever knew, and a man who had courage of his convictions. When I sit down I will take that as the first business. I wish to thank you for your kind hearing and the great attention you have given to my address.