

## PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS.

The CHAIRMAN: You will note that on the agenda the next item set down is the President's address. Well, I think I can promise you that my address will not take up a great deal of the time of this Conference. I want, on your behalf, to thank the Midland miners' representatives and the miners for their kind invitation for us to hold our Conference in this beautiful town of theirs. It is perfectly true that the weather up to the present time has not been all that could be desired. Mr. Baker, when I spoke to him about the weather, said he had not thought about the thing in time or he might have been able to arrange the weather conditions. The town, so far as we have been able to see, is a well set out and roomy beautiful town, although it is situated in the heart of the Midlands practically. I believe that Leamington Spa has been only a name to most of us. Our Federation Conference, I believe, is here for the first time, and you don't require to go very far into

the country from the town itself, until you come right into the heart probably of the most beautiful scenery in England. You come across old-fashioned ancient villages, and as you have heard from Mr. Baker, not only is the town and its surroundings historical, but you are going to have an opportunity, perhaps on Thursday, of visiting perhaps the birthplace of probably the greatest man, probably the greatest man of letters, that ever lived in history.

When our Conference met last year in Keswick, we had just finished a short time before that the proceedings of the Coal Commission, and it was generally believed amongst the miners, and I believe generally, the belief that the coal mines of this country would be nationalised, taken over by the Government and worked in the interests of the State. Twelve months has elapsed. We carried on a public propaganda through the country. We submitted the whole question to the representatives of the organised Labour movement, as to whether or not, in view of the Government declining to nationalise the mines, general action should be taken by the Labour movement to force the hands of the Government. The organised Labour movement at the moment could not see their way to take strike action at least, or industrial action to have the mines nationalised. I feel convinced of this, the rank and file of the Labour movement, the organised Labour movement of this country and its delegates who met at that Conference would have been unanimously in favour of the nationalisation of the mines. I don't think there can be any question on that point, but they felt evidently that the time had not come yet for taking any drastic or violent action in order to force the realisation of our desire. There has been a considerable amount of satisfaction expressed in the Press at the trend events have taken so far as nationalisation is concerned, and it is suggested that nationalisation is dead and buried. Well, I want to state here, as emphatically as it is possible for me to make a statement, that nationalisation of the mines of this country is not dead, and that the time will arrive sooner or later—I hope the time is not far distant—when the nation, in the nation's interests, will take a sensible view of this question and take over the production of its own coal in the interests of the community. I want to say further, as I have stated again and again, while we are desirous of carrying organised Labour and, if possible, the whole nation with us on this question, there is one point—I have stated it before, and I want to repeat it. Rightly or wrongly we say, that nationalisation, public ownership, and public development of the mining industry would be in the interests and safety of the mining community, and on that point I should not be prepared to allow general public opinion to go against our own on that matter. It is generally stated that the Miners' Federation of Great Britain wishes to play the part, as it were, of God Almighty in the Labour movement, and also in the affairs of the country, and I feel sure that ordinary people, even in Leamington, reading the statements which appear from time to time in some sections of the Press, have been particularly nervous for some time past and will hardly have been enjoying their rest at night with the thought of those violent anarchists of the Miners' Federation coming to visit their town. I want to state that the Miners' Federation do not want to play the part of the Almighty in this country, and they have no desire at all to use their power or threaten the Government and threaten the Nation, the nation ought not to forget the great mass of human beings they represent, the organised mining movement of this country, with their wives and families, that the organised workers have been for the past 100 years struggling in season and out of season, almost night and day, to emerge from the cursed system of slavery

and degradation which they occupied under private ownership of the mines. Hardly 100 years has passed yet since, in some parts of the mining districts of Great Britain, men were bought and sold with the mines, and their families indeed, in many cases, looked upon as the property of the mineowner. We have emerged from that slowly and surely, trying to reach our place in a higher state of civilisation, and surely no one can blame the miners and their families for having higher ideals than their surroundings would seem to justify them in having. I want to say that we have not emerged from it through the philanthropy or kindness of the mineowners of this country, nor even through the action of the nation itself. It is true that from time to time men and women, not of our own class, have spoken on behalf of the miners and have used their influence and spent their lives almost working for the improvement in the conditions of the miners, but so far as the mineowners were concerned, and so far as the capitalistic system generally was concerned, and yea, so far as our Government was concerned generally, the miners have had to work out their own salvation, their own social salvation in the face of bitter opposition in every mining district of the country. They worked that out not as individuals, they never could have worked it out, standing as individuals, each fighting for their own hand, they worked it through the power and combination of their organisation, and now we have reached a stage when we can say that the coal mining organisation of this country is practically a 100 per cent. organised. We still think it is our duty to do everything in our power to continue to improve the state of the wives and children and families of the mining community.

When we were at Keswick we expected that nationalisation, as I have already stated, would be realised within a reasonable time. There were other things which we expected, and which we were entitled to expect by the revelations brought out at the Royal Commission in connection with the housing conditions, with the health conditions of the mining community. We believed, after the strong opinions expressed in the Press, fully justified us that immediately something would be done with regard to housing, with regard to baths at mines, with regard to some attempt to purify and humanise the mining districts, that it would be the duty of the nation at the earliest possible moment to deal with these matters. As a matter of fact, your representatives, with other representatives on the Coal Commission, were so deeply interested in the housing question, and, mark you, the employers' representatives, the coalowners' representatives on that Commission, as well as the miners' representatives, were so deeply interested in the housing question that they consulted the representatives of the Local Government Board, Minister of Health, those who were responsible for housing in London, both with regard to English and Welsh housing, and also Scotch conditions. With regard to Scotch housing, we believed that the Government were fully alive to the serious state of matters, and we believed also that the Government would immediately be in a position to set to work to seriously solve the housing problem. Now, the housing problem is not a miners' problem only, it is a national problem, and the nation ought to recognise that you cannot raise a strong, healthy, pure people under conditions which our people generally are housed at the present time, and we had the right to expect that something would be done in that direction, and also that something would be done to provide our people with accommodation to wash themselves at the colliery and leave the filth and dirt of the mine at the mine instead of taking it home. Nothing has been done up to the present. I have been making inquiries since I came to Leamington from the people who represent this region under the Ministry of Health, and who are actively working

with regard to housing. Leamington cannot be called a manufacturing town, although it is the centre of a great manufacturing district. The housing problem in Leamington is not so pressing as it is in Birmingham and all the great industrial centres round about, but I understand that even Leamington would require some 300 houses (working-class houses) in order to meet the estimate. Those who have travelled on the tramcar or on foot must have been struck by the fact that in Leamington itself you will find, I dare say, hundreds of houses - I have counted them by the score at least, of large, commodious, beautiful dwelling houses - standing empty or for sale. Now that is typical of the whole country, and if the nation were really in earnest, if the Government of the nation really felt the force of this problem, there would not be empty mansions or houses and houseless working people in this country at all. If the problem cannot be met at the moment because of the lack of labour or material something could be done in the meantime to house many families in the empty houses that are now standing. The problem is serious, and it is difficult. I have heard since I came to Leamington that the Birmingham region, which includes Birmingham and a large number of towns for a considerable number of miles round about, requires thousands of houses. Machinery has been set up to build these houses, but there is a serious lack of material, and, strange to say, the complaint is that one of the materials that is lacking and is keeping back building in this region is lack of fuel - sufficient coal; the right kind of coal cannot be secured to prepare for the making of the bricks which are necessary, and that has largely kept back the building of workmen's houses. I never heard of a more amazing thing.

Now, side by side with that, you are aware of the seriousness of the housing problem, which has led to the condemnation of luxury building, and the building of picture halls in all the great industrial centres. In every great industrial centre picture halls have been erected, and luxury building is going on, and to such an extent has it taken place that almost a unanimous protest was sent through the Press and public platforms. The Government department gave municipalities the right to prohibit or veto the building of picture palaces and luxury buildings. Now one would have thought that was a wise thing to do, that people ought to be provided with houses before picture shows at least, and we thought that that to some extent would assist. I have been told by those in authority that those interested in luxury building and picture palaces have appealed to another department, and that department has turned down the right of the municipalities of vetoing picture palaces and luxury buildings. It is all a question, as it has been all during the war, a number of Government departments between which there is no co-ordination or national feeling when one department is turning down another department and interfering with their work. I have dealt with this at some length, because in my opinion the housing problem is one of the most serious with which the nation is faced at the present time. I think it would be possible, if we were in earnest, to build houses, and I believe the best and wisest way to have done so would have been to have taken into their confidence the representatives of the Trade Union movement connected with the building trade and have immediately started direct labour on the erection of working-class houses in this country. This week you will be asked to discuss two very important questions, national questions, which are not directly raised on the agenda. These we expect may take up a considerable part of your time, but they are of such importance that we feel they ought to get the fullest possible consideration. Next week there will be a conference, a national conference of the Trade Union movement held in London. To some extent that conference has been

convened at the request of the railwaymen, miners, and transport workers in the initial stages at the request of the Triple Alliance. The meeting is to discuss the question of our intervention in Russia; also the question of the military occupation of Ireland and the serious danger which exists at the present time of a general massacre of the Irish people. These two questions will be discussed at the Conference this week, and also at the conference in London. We hope that our delegates will be in a position to tell the country that so far as the miners are concerned they are on the side of the struggling people of Russia, who are endeavouring to settle down under their own Government and conduct the affairs of Russia according to the minds of the Russian people.

We hope that our minds will be with our own country, as there is quite sufficient in hand in reorganising our own affairs without interfering with the affairs of Russia or interfering in the settlement of the affairs of Russia. Ireland is nearer home. All the world is our people, certainly, but to a greater extent our sympathies must always go out to our own families, as it were, and our Irish people on the other side of the Channel, rightly, or wrongly, believe that they ought to have the right to determine their own affairs. If there is one thing more than another that has been the slogan which has carried us through the four and a-half years of the terrible war, that buoyed up our own lads and sent many of them to the front, it was the higher ideal that nations ought to have the right of self-determination, and that little nations on the Continent ought to have the right of governing themselves rather than be bullied by a larger Power. If we can justify the pouring out of the blood of our own people in the claim for the self-determination of small nations on the Continent, are we not entitled to say that our small nations nearer home ought to have that same right of self-determination. I believe that everyone is imbued with the desire of seeing every part of the British Empire united more closely, if possible, together in a common brotherhood. Many of us would deplore, all of us would deplore, the idea of Ireland, or Scotland, or Wales, being broken away from this old Empire of ours, and we should be delighted if such a thing could be instituted, some idea of uniting us more firmly together than has been in the past. While that is our dream it ought to be the people of the nation itself to have the right of determining that. I think you will be called upon to ask the Government to withdraw the military from Ireland and allow the people of Ireland the right to settle their own affairs.

In view of the fact you will discuss this fully, I don't want to deal with it any further. You will remember that at Keswick last year the Government had expressed their determination just at the time we met to increase the price of coal by 6s. per ton. It is true there was a by-election on at that time, and many of us believed that those who were running the coal supply of the country were desirous of endeavouring to prove to the electors who were about to elect a member to the House of Commons the wickedness of the miners who were forcing up the price of coal. We were told at Keswick that if we were willing to give a guarantee that we would take no action, or any action for three months, the 6s. would be dropped. We refused to bind ourselves even for three months on a matter of that kind, and it was proved shortly after that the 6s. which went on the price of coal, that there was absolutely no necessity in penalising the householders of this country by adding 6s. to the price of coal, and largely through our action of what has been termed the selfish miner, largely through our action, the Government was forced to take 10s. off the price of household coal. Then again, it was done at the time of a by-election, when it was thought the kindness of the Government

in taking 10s. off the price of household coal might win another election. The Government since that time have added 14s. 2d. to the price of household coal at a time when the cost of living was continuing to soar, and soaring higher than ever, at a time when there was poverty and penury in the homes of the worst-paid and most ill-used class of our community, and when the Government might be sure it would be impossible to reduce the cost of living by adding 14s. 2d. to the price of household coal. We immediately, through our Secretary, published facts which went to prove there was no necessity for 14s. 2d. being added to householders' coal bill. Mr. Hodges and your Executive have gone very fully into this matter. They have been supplied with figures issued from time to time by the Coal Trade Departments of the Government, and were in a position to state that there has not been any necessity to put this 14s. 2d. on the price of coal. Your Executive are extremely anxious that the miners should make an effort to reduce the price of coal to householders by at least 14s. 2d. per ton. I dare say that many of you here, representing men who are not by any means too highly paid, representing men, especially in homes where there were large families of little ones, where they were finding it very difficult at the week-ends to make ends meet, you will think that we are putting forward something that is idealistic here in endeavouring to get the Government to do something to reduce the cost of living to the extent of about £5 or £6 per year to every householder in the country. It may be said that other great Trade Unions have not taken such a high idealistic view of the matter as we ourselves have done. We should not allow, I think, in this matter we should not allow what other people think to govern us in a question of this kind. We have done many things which we believe to be in the interests of the nation as a whole. We have offered on many occasions to come on strike if necessary with the rest of organised Labour, not for anything we ourselves sought or desired for ourselves, but in the interests of the nation as a whole, so that what your Executive will ask you to discuss this week is the question of whether or not the Government should be asked to reduce the price of coal to the householders of this country to the extent of 14s. 2d. per ton, and at the same time to give an increase in wages to the mine workers of the country. Of course, it will be said, Where is the money to come from? It will be said that the coal industry ought to stand on its own footing. The money to give a reduction of 14s. 2d. per ton to the householders of the country, which would reflect ultimately, I believe, to some extent in a slight reduction in the general cost of living, because wherever you put 14s. 2d. on to the price of a ton of coal, either industrial or household, to the same extent that must be paid for by the consumers of other commodities and will tend to raise the cost of living—well, we say that the money to reduce the cost of household coal ought to come out of the coal trade itself, and the money to give a substantial increase in miners' wages ought also to come out of the coal trade. We say it is in the coal trade. We say that the Government at the present time are in a position to reduce the price of coal by 14s. 2d. a ton on domestic coal and give the miners a considerable increase in wages, and that the coal trade as a whole will still be a paying proposition. Now if that is so, we think there ought to be no difficulty in convincing the Government and the nation of the wisdom of taking this step.

The Government must either reduce the price of domestic coal and give an advance in wages—a certain advance in wages—or, if they refuse for some reason to reduce the price of domestic coal, then the miners will have to claim the full surplus from the coal trade, because it must be remembered that the employers have their profits—princely profits, profits never

previously dreamed of in the coal trade—guaranteed to them by Act of Parliament. It ought not to be unfair, I think, for us to demand either the householders should be relieved from this very large increase added to the price of coal or the miners ought to claim the whole available amount. The Prime Minister claims that the Exchequer is entitled to all surplus that is made from the coal industry. Of course, it is pointed out that the household trade and our industrial coal trade would not pay standing alone, but that it is the export trade—the extraordinary price we are getting for our export trade to foreign countries—which enables us to have a surplus, and the Prime Minister holds that the surplus which has come from the foreigner he is entitled to put in the Exchequer for the reduction of taxation. We say he is not entitled to put it in the Exchequer. If you want to raise money by taxation to carry on the country there are other sources from which it should come rather than from a surplus in the coal trade. We say the taking away of the 14s. 2d. per ton would cost £36,000,000, and would reduce the cost of living to that extent to the coal consumers—to domestic coal consumers of this country—and there would be a surplus still of £29,500,000, which would be available for wages. That surplus is at present going into the National Exchequer. The miners have not yet reached the position that they are able to face the increased cost of living, and the Exchequer is not entitled to take money from the coal mining industry until they have first of all enabled the men to face the increased cost of living which has been imposed upon us largely through profiteering.

Well, these are the main points, although you have a number of very important resolutions on your agenda. Many of them, it is true, will not take up very much of our time as they have been dealt with previously. I am reminded by the Secretary, although I was intending to touch upon it, of probably the most important subject that will be before us this week. You are aware that the Government has introduced a Bill called the Ministry of Mines Bill. The probability is they have given it that name chiefly because for over 20 years the miners have been asking for the establishment of a Minister of Mines. We have thought for 20 years that the importance of the mining industry, or that it was of sufficient importance to have a Ministry of Mines, under whose jurisdiction would be the whole question of health of everybody and everyone connected with the mines, so that the Government has given this Bill the name of the Ministry of Mines Bill. They ought to have given it the title of the Enslavement of the Miners Bill, because it is more like that than a real Ministry of Mines Bill. The question of the 14s. 2d. a ton on domestic coal and the new Ministry of Mines Bill are closely linked up together there is not any doubt. I say this quite deliberately. Sir Robert Horne said, in answering one of our own people in the House of Commons, that it is untrue to say that this Bill is an attempt to break up or injure the solidarity of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain. I, personally, believe, that to a very great extent, Sir Robert Horne and those connected with him, so far as the coal trade is concerned, are, to a great extent, the tools of the mineowners of this country. It is well known that the mineowners' representatives have hardly ever been away—the chief officials have hardly ever been away—from London for several months past, and have been in consultation with the Government. Why? Because mineowners are bitterly opposed to nationalisation, and have been anxious, and are anxious, that the coal industry should be handed back into the hands of the private owners of the mines, so that they could get back to the old system of every company owning and controlling and acting as they cared to with their own collieries, and by doing that the consumer of coal would suffer, because if there were no controlled prices at the present time coal would

have gone up to whatever point the mineowners could have secured from the consumer. There is no doubt on that, and still the householders are told that the wicked miners have raised the price of coal. My answer to that is, that the wicked miners were responsible in the first place for appealing to the Government to put down their foot strongly and prevent the price of coal going up under the free competition of the mineowners themselves, and I feel sure under the free competition again the price of household coal would go up. The Government have been preparing for months to hand back the mining industry to the mineowners, and knew that they could not do that without raising the price of coal to the householder, and also of industrial coal. They said we cannot hand back the mines again or we cannot arrange the method under such a Bill as this unless we are in a position to say that each of the eight or nine or ten districts, or areas, or divisions, into which we propose to divide the mining industry is self-supporting, and in order to make them self-supporting they placed this 14s. 2d. on the price of household coal, and increased the price of industrial coal. They did that so they would have a chance of bringing forward their policy. If you will remember, Lloyd George, when he told us that the Government could not see its way to nationalise the mines, put the question direct to us: Would you be prepared to accept some other system such as dividing the mining industry into areas and the appointment of Joint Committees for the purpose of controlling these areas? Our answer, on your behalf, was: That we were not prepared to accept anything of that kind as it was going to drive us back again to the old system, the early system of bargaining as collieries or districts in wages questions, and that we had got beyond that stage. We are trying gradually to raise the lower paid section of the men in our collieries and the lower paid districts a little nearer to the higher paid districts. We were determined that it was essential, in the interests of the miners, that we should bargain nationally and not in sections. We said we would prefer, in the meantime, if nationalisation were not coming now, that the mining industry should go back to the old position of national negotiations in wages rather than go into sectional divisions such as you have in this Bill. We put forward nationalisation chiefly in order that we might have some control. The owners said: If you give the miners any control, or unless we are left with full executive control of the coal mines, or our mines—Lord Gainford said he was speaking on behalf of the Mining Association of Great Britain when he said—unless we are left with full executive control we would prefer that the Government should take over the mines and work them in the national interests, so that Lord Gainford and the mineowners did not intend, and will not work the mines if they are not left with full executive control. We say that the mineowners cannot be left with full executive control of the mines. Too long have they had full executive control of the mines. Too long has the control of the mines being vested in the hands of the capitalist classes. Too long have we been denied the same right of control as the mineowners. This Bill does not give any right of real control. In the first place it proposes to set up eight or nine districts or areas, in which the mines will be grouped together, and set up committees for the working of the groups. Set up a central committee keeping in touch with the Minister of Mines in the various groups and every group would require to be responsible for its own rates of wages and its own negotiations. I want to put it to my friend, Whitefield, who has been struggling for years and years under adverse circumstances, I want to ask him what the state of matters would be in the south-western area if they grouped your little districts together, if you were to stand on your own legs? Their wages would inevitably tend down, and probably mines would have to be closed and men sent elsewhere to work. The same thing would apply

to other districts. Of course, we know, on the other hand, on account of the exporting, other districts could pay higher wages and declare fabulous dividend to their shareholders. There is no doubt about it that this Federation could not exist for two years if this Bill is placed on the Statute Book, and we advise you to let the Government know that we are not prepared to accept this Bill in any shape or form. It is quite impossible, in my opinion, to amend this Bill and make it satisfactory unless you take out every clause of it with the exception that there shall be a Ministry of Mines. Leave that in and take out every other clause. It is quite impossible to make a satisfactory Bill of it at the present time, and it is quite inconceivable for the mineowners or ourselves to accept this Bill or any section of the Bill. I am sure I am not required to appeal to any great extent to this Conference to conduct its business this week in its usual way. We have usually maintained a very high tone in our discussions on practically every question. Your Executive believes that we will be able to deal fully with the question of the Mines Bill, the question of Ireland and Russia, the question of whether or not we shall make a claim for an increase in wages—that is a very important question—and we believe we will be able to have a full, open, and fair discussion, and also give due justice to all the resolutions on the agenda. We believe we will be able to do that, and also accept the hospitality of Mr. Baker and his colleagues in the Midland Federation, and also see a little of the country by visiting the birthplace of the Immortal Bard. It will largely depend upon the Chairman and upon you, and I want to warn you that I will endeavour, so far as I possibly can, to give justice to every delegate, the right of speech to every delegate. I will endeavour to keep within the time, and enable us to finish our business this week.