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## PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS.

MR. PETER LEE (ACTING PRESIDENT.)

FELLOW DELEGATES,

Since our Conference last year death has been very active amongst our leaders. At a Conference held in May we passed a vote of sympathy with their relatives, yet I think it only right to speak of our loss here of Mr. A. J. Cook, our late Secretary, and Mr. T. Richards, who for so long was Vice-President and for a while President of this Federation, and also Messrs. J. Doonan, H. Murnin, and J. Hood, of Scotland, Mr. W. Carter, of Nottingham, and Mr. G. Davies, of South Wales. They were all well-known men, always good workers in our movement. Let us hope that we who are here will endeavour to do our part, as they did theirs, in seeking to bring about a better state both as regards conditions of labour and higher wages for mine workers.

There will be laid before you a report on reorganisation, to which I trust you will give careful consideration. During next year the Committee, with the co-operation of the districts, must take up this question, and also that of increasing our membership. There is room for improvement in the way some districts pay on membership to this Federation when compared with their actual members. We must also put forth a greater effort to bring in those who are at present outside the unions; and very close attention should be given to the action of craft and other associations who claim to organise those whom we have always said should belong to district unions that comprise this Federation. Let us enter upon this task in the right spirit, and I have no doubt that the result will be a large increase of members.

The year we have passed through has been an exceedingly bad one for the coal trade. From the "Ministry of Labour Gazette" of June last we find that out of 1,046,870 persons in the industry 215,793 are unemployed, and 122,320 only partially employed, and according to the White Paper issued by the Mines Department last December there were only 799,374 persons working in and about the mines of Britain. This was 49,970 less than in December, 1930.

I have set out the figures dealing with production, export, foreign and coastwise bunkers, and what remained for home consumption for the years 1929 to 1931, which are as follows:—

**FIGURES RELATING TO  
OUTPUT, EXPORTS, FOREIGN AND COASTWISE BUNKERS, AND BALANCE  
REMAINING FOR INLAND CONSUMPTION.  
1929-1931.**

Year.	Output. (Tons)	Exports. (Tons)	Bunkers Foreign. (Tons)	Bunkers Coastwise. (Tons)	TOTAL. (Tons)	Balance remaining for Inland Con- sumption. (Tons)
1929...	257,887,551	60,266,618	16,394,209	1,550,728	78,211,555	179,675,996
1930...	243,862,100	54,879,479	15,616,691	1,450,198	71,946,363	171,915,732
1931...	220,156,600	42,749,740	14,609,545	1,339,115	58,698,400	161,458,200

These figures reveal to us how our coal trade is suffering. The same is true of some other nations, and I regret to state that returns for the early months of this year indicate that trade is still declining. Taking the first four months as an average for the year, our export trade for 1932 will only reach about 39,000,000 tons—about 5,000,000 less than last year and over 21,000,000 less than 1929, and actually below our export trade of 31 years ago. These figures are not pleasant reading to our Conference, and we all know the great hardships experienced in our mining villages due to unemployment and low wages, also the working of that vile law, the Means Test, which in operation may help the taxpayer, but increases the burden of the ratepayers, bringing still more hardship and suffering into the homes that are already feeling the pinch of poverty as a result of the neglect of Governments to find work for the people.

We are often told the Quota is responsible for unemployment and that the miners would be better without it. I hope our members will not give any support to these stories, as there is no truth in such wild statements. In fact, time has proved that the Labour Government in 1930 took a wise course in establishing it by law. The late Mr. Graham was not able to do all he would have desired in the Act, yet the principle was sound. This was shown in May last when the new Mines Bill was brought forward, which extended the Quota for another five years. During the debate on the Bill it was made quite clear that if the Quota was taken out it would be a very serious thing for the miners. If there should be any of our members who think the Quota has been or will be detrimental to us I would advise them to read the Memorandum sent to the Minister of Mines by your Committee, and then consider what Mr. Foot said on Tuesday, 31st May, 1932, while speaking on the Second Reading of the Bill:—

“ We invited the Miners’ Federation to express their views and they put their views before us in a pamphlet; a very masterly statement of the case. I have not the manifesto before me and I will not quote

from it now. I invite every Member of the House who wishes to acquaint himself with the operation of Part I. of the Act to study that manifesto. It was a memorandum for which we were very grateful and it has been the most substantial factor in the decision at which the Government have arrived. I think their case as stated in it is unanswerable.

“ The broad fact is that the potential production of coal in this country is over 300,000,000 tons a year. Last year we produced about 220,000,000 tons. That is a difference of nearly 100,000,000 tons, and in that difference you have the problem which will arise if you do away with Part I. and leave it to chaotic unrestricted production. In the desperate efforts to secure forward contracts it would become just an unrestricted gamble of beggar my neighbour, and the people who would suffer worse would be the workers in the industry, because prices would fall generally, which would inevitably mean lower wages.”

To my mind the Quota was late in being established and needs improving. We should aim too at improving the selling prices, and a voice in the fixing of them, whilst at the same time standing for a system of regulation and control both in the home and export trades.

Another change which has taken place since we last met is that the Act of July, 1931, which, while it gave the owners a guaranteed seven and a-half hour day for one year, also gave the miners a legal guarantee on wages for one year, has been replaced by the Act of June, 1932, which gives the mine-owners all they requested, and leaves the miners with what has been called a “ gentleman’s agreement.”

For the present then we have this “ gentleman’s agreement,” but what is going to take its place at the end of twelve months, which will soon pass away? How will the miners’ case then stand if there are only district negotiations and none of a national character? Shall the old method still operate—one district being reduced in wages, and then the mineowners of another district saying they must get down their cost per ton to enable them to keep their trade? Unfortunately the lessons of the past are often forgotten. There are large numbers of people at the present time who believe that stoppages and trouble only came about in the coal trade with agreements and negotiations conducted on a national basis. Nothing can be further from the truth; and, to prove this, let me set out some of the stoppages that took place in the mining industry between the years 1879 and 1898, while only district settlements were in operation:—

		Weeks.
1879	Durham .....	6
1881-2	Lancashire .....	7
1885	Yorkshire .....	9
1887	Northumberland .....	17
1890	Yorkshire, Lancashire, Midlands.....	9
1892	Durham .....	13
1893	Federated District .....	16
1894	Scotland .....	16
1898	South Wales and Monmouth .....	22

We find in this record that in a period of less than 19 years there was experienced two years and eleven weeks’ idle time for the miners. In nearly

every case the cause was a claim for a reduction of wages; and we also find that never once during those years was there a period of more than four years when the whole of the British coalfield was at work. Since those days great changes have been experienced in the industrial life of Britain, and I may say in the world at large also. The tendency of the age is towards a stronger national control and co-operation in all the large industries of the nation for the purpose of production and distribution. It has been established by law on the railways, and at the present time national co-operation is being sought in the iron and steel trades. The Mines Act of 1930, amended by that of 1932, aims at national co-operation for the fixing of district, national and international selling prices and production. If the nation recognises that need for co-operation on a national basis for production and distribution, it must in time also provide for working conditions and wages to be considered nationally; and we can only expect real progress to be made in our national life when not only the employers, but employees and the Government of Great Britain, take these questions up in the right spirit and agree to establish a new industrial system.

I am pleased to note that Sir Arthur Salter, K.C.B., in his book "Recovery," points out the fact that we must leave the old system of unregulated competition of the last century and work out a new one for the industrial need of the age, which he outlines very clearly:—

"That task is not to find a middle way but a new way; to fashion a system in which competition and individual enterprise on the one hand, and regulation and general planning on the other, will be so adjusted that the abuses of each will be avoided and the benefits of each retained. We need to construct such a framework of law, custom, institutions, and planned guidance and direction that the thrust of individual effort and ambition can only operate to the general advantage. We may find a simile for our task in the arch of a great bridge, so designed that the stresses and strains of the separate blocks which constitute it—each pushing and thrusting against the other—support the whole structure by the interaction of their reciprocal pressure."

Mr. H. H. Merrett also in his book, "I Fight for Coal," makes out a very strong case for reorganisation both in production and distribution in all branches. It will be well for the coal trade and the nation generally if during the next few months the Government, mine-owners and workmen will do what is possible to give a greater measure of help and justice to those who so well serve the nation in the darkness, toil and danger of the coal mines, and also give a greater security from strife to the people of this country.

Not only are these periods of strife and struggle a great cause of suffering at the time, but in these days of strong and increasing world power of production often damage our international trade, and amidst the world's economic difficulties our aim ought to be, at least, to keep our industry in the best condition possible to meet the great changes which must come both in national and international trade. Our hard experience is but part of the greater industrial trading difficulties of the nation and the whole world.

In the "Daily Herald" of Monday, 13th June, 1932, there are given some very important figures taken from the report of the Economic Committee of the League of Nations, which show the grievous state of employment and trade amongst the nations:—

"Between 20,000,000 and 25,000,000 people are now out of work, the report states, and since the first quarter of 1929 the number of unemployed persons has more than doubled.

In the same period the value of international trade has fallen by more than half.

Meanwhile the situation grows worse from day to day, and the world is awaiting with dread what the morrow will bring.

If there is anyone so foolish enough to imagine that one country can benefit from the distress of others some figures contained in the report should enlighten them.

These show the decline in trade of the principal nations between January, 1930 and 1932.

The United Kingdom imports declined by 39 per cent., exports by 47 per cent. In the United States imports were down by 58 per cent., exports by 63 per cent. In Germany imports were down 66 per cent., exports 49 per cent. In France imports were down 51 per cent., exports 51 per cent. In Austria imports fell 47 per cent., exports 47 per cent. In Hungary imports were down 59 per cent., exports 70 per cent."

These figures reveal to us that tariffs or the present method of dealing with international exchange, and control of war debts and payments, cannot bring back prosperity to the nations. Some great change must in time be undertaken by our rulers and commercial men of the world.

I often wish that the danger and toil under which the miners have to gain their daily bread could be by some means revealed to the general public. Those of us who have put in 20 years or so of mining life are able to look back to times when we came very near to being killed, and we have had the sad experience of being called upon to give assistance in recovering the bodies of our less fortunate fellow men when death has overtaken them. There are few of us that do not carry some marks or disability caused by serious accident sustained while at work. The miner in the darkness underground is always at war with the forces of nature, which his labour to extract coal sets into operation. If we take the four years 1927 to 1930, we find there were 4,275 fatal accidents, and during the same period 683,446 persons were injured in or about the mines. These figures compiled by the Mines Department lay bare in part the result of that war; but no Department can compile the sorrow, hardship and disastrous change in prospects that death brings into the miner's cottage; and yet those who have to labour in or about the mines are amongst the lowest paid workmen of our nation.

When we met at Blackpool last year a Labour Government held office, and we were a Free Trade country. Now we have what is termed a National Government, and are building up tariff walls against our neighbours. The Labour Party in the House of Commons are but few in numbers compared with 1930, even our mining Members lost about half their seats. But we still lead the way in organised labour in returning Parliamentary representatives. I hope we shall long maintain first place, and that others will also very largely increase their numbers.

At the present time the other side are once more stating that politics in Trade Unions is wrong, but they do not follow their own teaching. It was the power of the large industrial magnates in the House which brought into being Free Trade, and the same power is now at work to establish tariff barriers. All the talk about cutting politics out is only to mislead and cause trouble and dissension in the ranks of working people. Each year brings out more clearly to all thinking people that only through the workers being very strongly united on the industrial side and with power in the Commons will the wrongs under which we suffer be removed, and

better state of society be established; and let us remember that although the present time is one of great struggle and hardship for all concerned in the coal trade, we must not lose hope, for it is still a great industry and very important to the country. The prosperity and high place which during the last century Britain held amongst the nations was the result of our coal production. It not only gave a cheap and essential commodity to our other industries, but sent out by our vast export trade cheap coal to other countries. It is true this coal output that gave so much wealth to others gave but a poor remuneration to the miners who produced the coal amid the great dangers and hard toil of the mine. At the present time, as a result of research and invention, there are signs that in a few years the demand for coal will increase. New methods and the various ways in which it can be used will be found, and it is the duty, not only of the mine-owners and miners, but of citizens and the Government to see that the whole system of coal production is arranged so that the best results will be obtained by the nation, while the mine workers shall have more consideration shown to them, with a higher standard of life and better conditions under which they are called upon to labour.

In closing, I want to make this appeal to all miners: be of good courage, keep strong your district unions, and have confidence in your cause.

In the past we have had a seven-hour day and National Agreements. These were taken away from us in 1926, but they can be restored, and our aim should be towards that goal. The true result of increased machinery and greater power of production should be to give a shorter working day, keeping men at work receiving wages to spend, instead of placing them on the unemployed list to live under conditions that are not helpful to increased trade either at home or abroad.

When the Committee of the Miners' Federation met Mr. Runciman, President of the Board of Trade, and the Minister of Mines at the House of Commons on May 31st, 1932, a promise was given that Mr. Foot would meet the Committee, so that the question of some change in the machinery governing the National Industrial Court might be considered. We hope this meeting will soon take place with good results to the industry.

It is clear that the next few months will be very important for the coal trade. May we hope that all those who have to deal with the questions which must arise will fully recognise the very grave responsibility there is in the work? If the three parties who will have to undertake the task enter upon it in the right spirit it is quite possible to arrive at a decision that will establish a far more satisfactory system to govern the coal trade than we have experienced for many years, for what has been found possible in other industries should be attainable at the mines.