

PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS

Mr. JONES (VICE-PRESIDENT) : I have now great pleasure in calling upon the President, Mr. Peter Lee, to deliver his Presidential Address.

Mr. PETER LEE (PRESIDENT) : Since our Scarborough Conference last July, we have lost by death E. Morrell (South Wales), G. Price (Yorkshire), G. H. Hirst (Yorkshire), H. Twist (Lancashire), J. W. Wright (Power Group). They have ended their earthly journey after good service in the cause of labour; and of each we may truthfully say he lived to help and improve the lot of the people whom he served. Let us keep their memory green by following the same path, with devotion to our cause and perseverance against those forces opposing the progress of our people.

We have also to report several mining disasters, in which three or more lives have been lost. These were mostly explosions and covered a wide area of our coalfields; and although the loss of life is not so great as we reported last year, these sad occurrences come much too frequently, and should reveal to all the need for more serious attention and vigilance on the part of all concerned. In the ventilation of our mines it is not sufficient to have a large volume of air in the main roads, but each working face should also have very close supervision in this respect as it is in these parts where explosions generally occur. We note that for a few days after these sad fatalities the general public are led to see and think of the dangers of mining; but it is only we miners who can fully realise the sorrow and desolation that arises from the toll of the mines in the single deaths caused day by day. Last year over 800 homes suffered the loss of their breadwinners, and were called upon to face that sad experience of separation by the hand of death, and at the beginning of our Conference I desire that we show our respect for all who have fallen, and our sympathy with all those who have been bereaved, by standing for a few moments in silence.

We are holding our Annual Conference this year in a great city. Edinburgh is not only the capital of Scotland, but a city which for age after age has played a great part

in the affairs of our island home, and her children have gone forth into all parts of the world to work and help in the general welfare of mankind. In almost every part of the city we are reminded of the past history of this nation, and the monuments you will see show that the citizens have both respect and reverence for the great ones of the past; but to us as working men, in common with others, one name will stand out very clearly, Robert Burns. One sometimes wonders why he, dying in the 18th Century, should still live so strongly in the memory and love of his fellow men and have such powerful influence on the men and women of the 20th Century. One of the best reasons I ever read of was given by a working man over ninety years ago. He said:—

“It is because he had the heart of a man in him. He was all heart and all man; and there is nothing, at least, in a poor man’s experience, either bitter or sweet, which can happen to him, but a line from Burns springs into his mouth and gives him courage and comfort, if needed. It is like a second Bible.”

These words are still true. In life, Burns was ever the champion of the poor and the oppressed; and the poor of to-day look up, and are proud to hear his name, which still brings hope and comfort.

WAGE QUESTION AND NATIONAL AGREEMENT

I regret that your Committee have again to report a year of effort and endeavour to establish a National Agreement and have failed. Both the Mineowners and the Government have once more rejected the offer made in your name. But we must not lose heart nor allow anything to turn us from the pursuit of our object. In a long life of struggle and labour I have never taken part in a more just claim or a matter affecting our interests and the general welfare of the industry more deeply. The old system of individual enterprise and price-cutting stands condemned and in these days can only bring low wages and small profits. I place before you figures from the White Paper issued by the Mines Department which gives some very important information on this question leaving out the year 1920, when, according to the Government White Paper, both working cost and selling price were each over 39s. per ton, and over 1,206,000 persons were employed in or about the British mines. Let us take the December quarter of each year since the 1921 Lock-out and also include the September quarter of 1933 (all from Government White Papers) then we shall be able to follow each year, and recognise how vast have been the changes shown by the figures on page 17.

I venture to state that no twelve years in the history of our great industry can show such a sad record, for whilst, before 1914, each period of ten years revealed a progressive increase both in production and number of persons employed, this period shows a steady fall in persons employed, and a total fall of 307,870, or almost 30 per cent. The wages cost is down by 6s. 11.19d. per ton, and other costs by 2s. 1.53d., making a total fall in working cost per ton of 9s. 0.72d. Yet, the selling price has fallen by 9s. 9.19d. per ton, turning what was a gain of 3.47d. per ton in 1921 into a loss of 5d. per ton in 1933.

The earnings per person have gone down from 12s. 7.89d. to 9s. 1.15d., a reduction in wages of 28 per cent., although the output per person has increased from 17.73 cwts. per shift to 22.11 cwts. per shift, an increase of 24 $\frac{3}{4}$ per cent.; and our working time was increased by one hour per day from 1926 to 1931, and is still one half-hour longer than it was in 1921. The above figures tell a disastrous story of loss both to employers and employed, as well as to the people of this country, on account of the large number of miners unemployed, and the very low spending power of those who are employed as a result of low wages and short time worked. When we examine our export trade we find the same trouble. In the year 1922, which was a full year (1921 was thirteen weeks short owing to a lock-out) our export of coal was 64,000,000 tons, while in 1932, it had fallen to less than 39,000,000 tons, or a loss to trade of over 25,000,000. Bunker, both foreign and

SUMMARY OF OUTPUT, SELLING PRICES, WAGE COST, ETC., FOR GREAT BRITAIN

Period		Wage Cost	Other Costs	Total Cost	Selling Price	Gain	Loss	Tons Disposable Commercially	Cwts. per Person	Earnings per Person	No. of Persons Employed
1921	Dec.	15/9.99	6/10.56	22/8.55	23/0.02	3.47	—	49,634,464	17.73	12/7.89	1,026,865
1922	Dec.	11/4.95	5/6.85	16/11.80	18/6.19	1/6.39	—	58,968,434	18.10	9/5.23	1,068,594
1923	Dec.	12/7.85	5/3.43	17/11.28	19/10.81	1/11.53	—	62,053,820	17.76	10/3.33	1,120,204
1924	Dec.	13/0.93	5/3.36	18/4.29	18/11.90	7.61	—	56,962,315	17.74	10/7.04	1,079,107
1925	Dec.	12/5.75	4/11.57	*17/5.32	*15/11.65	*1/6.70	—	57,194,540	18.31	10/5.14	1,041,997
†1926	April	12/4.64	5/0.38	*17/5.02	*15/6.71	*9.23	—	19,139,611	18.49	10/5.35	1,071,184
1927	Dec.	10/0.77	4/9.49	14/10.21	13/9.78	—	1/0.43	55,379,732	20.82	9/7.38	945,480
1928	Dec.	9/2.21	4/6.46	13/8.67	13/5.80	—	2.87	54,538,032	21.80	9/2.84	850,770
1929	Dec.	9/1.92	4/1.90	13/3.82	14/3.11	11.29	—	60,031,340	21.78	9/2.78	903,914
1930	Dec.	9/3.14	4/4.40	13/7.54	14/1.74	6.20	—	52,554,585	21.84	9/3.79	849,344
1931	Dec.	9/1.40	4/4.68	13/6.08	14/1.14	7.06	—	50,879,383	21.86	9/2.22	799,374
1932	Dec.	8/9.71	4/4.58	13/2.29	13/11.16	8.87	—	48,873,523	22.62	9/2.26	744,425
1933	Sept.	8/10.80	4/9.03	13/7.83	13/2.83	—	5.00	42,198,944	22.11	9/1.15	718,995

NOTES.—* 1925, December, Subvention 3/0.37. 1926, April, Subvention 2/7.54.

† Owing to Lock-out in 1926, the only available figures are up to April, 1926, as shown.

coastwise, was also down by about 4,500,000 tons. The home trade has dropped from 165,500,000 to 155,000,000 tons. So that we have shown here a loss in trade of 40,000,000 tons between the years 1922 and 1932.

Then again, while the present Government has been building tariff walls for the protection of other industries, other nations have been retaliating and striking at our export in coal. So the miners once more have had to bear the burden, and although, according to Board of Trade reports on trade and navigation, the first eleven months of 1933 show an increase in coal exports over the same period of 1932, we are still down 3,000,000 tons when compared with the first eleven months of 1931. Another important fact is that while we have sent abroad more tons of coal we have received less money for the sale of those coals. This is a strange way to bring about prosperity and higher wages, except to the foreigner who thus gets cheaper coal.

Furthermore, as I stated in my address to the Conference at Scarborough, the concerns in this country generating electricity and making gas made, in the years 1929-30-31, over eight times the amount of profit that was obtained by the whole of our British coal trade. When this is possible it proves there is something wrong with the system, which has failed to give a decent standard of life to the miners, or a return on capital, compared with other industries for which coal is the main raw material.

Taking all these factors which I have here dealt with, and others that might be given, it should be clear to all who seek the welfare of the coal trade, and those who must live by it, that the time is more than due for co-operation, for national instead of district action, and for joint efforts towards building up prosperity, instead of keeping apart until misunderstanding and strife have made conditions worse. Eventually, force of circumstances, as past experience has shown, is sure to compel us to come together and rebuild, after war, that which we could have strengthened and saved under peaceful conditions.

I cannot understand why the coalowners should object to a National Agreement. To my mind, there can only be two reasons for this. One is they believe they can better overcome the miners apart than together. I have pointed out before, and I do so again, that if they imagine they will force their own conditions on the mine-workers by the present method, they will meet with trouble, and, in the long run, failure, because what in their minds will bring separation in our ranks will eventually bring united action and strife.

The other reason is mistrust of the miners as to what they would do if a National Agreement was established. This mistrust is a short-sighted view. Let us, for a few moments, take the long and, to my mind, the true view. Throughout the world to-day is not this same feeling of distrust manifest in practically all our international dealings? We appear to live in an age of mistrust, but one in which trust is more essential than ever before. In the past, nations might distrust each other and fight it out with apparently little effect on the world as a whole. The progress of industry, science and international intercourse in these days is so great, and the experience of the last great war is so real that not only men but nations must realise that the human family is thus so linked together that we must work together in a co-operative spirit if civilisation is to endure. The difference between trust and mistrust is the difference between life and death, between civilisation and barbarism. I hold this is true of nations to-day, and in a smaller way, but equally as powerful in its results to our industry, if it is pursued between Mineowners and miners. By trust and co-operation, coal can once more be made a great and powerful asset and play a great part in bringing prosperity not only to miners and Mineowners, but to the nation.

It is just as true that if mistrust and separation have to continue we shall find no real prosperity or true progress. It is because of this faith in national effort, and the

experience of failure in the present method, that the miners must go forward. Let us not be less determined because of the forces against us. Our cause is just, therefore, time is sure to bring success; and the more we stand united in the dark days the sooner success will come, and the greater will be the gain to our children.

IMPROVEMENT IN UNIONS

I am pleased to state that during the year there has been an improvement in some of our District Unions; and although the Federation as a whole may not be able to record a larger membership, it is gratifying to read that the districts are gaining ground, for it will in time have a beneficial effect upon our Federation. But we must watch with great care on what principles we increase our membership, for there are times when even larger forces do not lead to greater strength. As we find some who seek co-operation whose presence in the past has not meant harmony but discord and strife, our aim must be not more but fewer Unions, and, in my opinion, time will show this more clearly and bring our aim nearer to realisation. But while we remain a Federation of District Associations we must demand true loyalty to those principles so essential to success, trust in each other and present a united front against any force that may oppose progress.

It is so easy to find fault and point out the lamentable conditions of our people, and, with you all, I deeply deplore the bitter years since 1925, during which period we have endured great hardships, low wages, much unemployment and a standard of life far below what should be established in this rich country. Yet we see signs that other people outside of our ranks have not only noted the deplorable conditions of the poor, endeavouring to influence public opinion and the Government in seeking to improve the conditions under which the workers live.

Two gentlemen in Durham county have written a pamphlet setting forth the distressing conditions in Durham and the urgent need for improvement. The pamphlet is one which may be helpful to other districts, and from the Durham miners I bring each of you a copy, and shall give a few facts which I feel sure will be of general interest, and assist others better to understand how the poor live, and the dangers to this or any other nation where the producers of national wealth have to share amongst so many homes so small a part of the wealth which is the result of their toil and labour.

After giving the number of families and the overcrowded state of the homes, they give what they believe is the average figure at the present time, for rent and rates on houses being built of two, three and four rooms, as 7s. 6d., 9s. 6d. and 11s. 6d., and then put forward two things the Local Authorities have to consider; either to fix a rent within reach of the lower paid workers, and so increase the already large rate, or fix a high rent and so reduce the sum available to cover the family budgets.

Then they have with great care gone into the important question of what is required to maintain a family of man, wife and one and up to four children, with an income fixed at £2 per week. (*See TABLE IV at foot of next page.*)

AGE AND WORK OF OUR FEDERATION

Forty-six years ago a few noble-hearted and far-seeing men recognised the weakness of districts standing alone and apart from other districts and by their efforts this Organisation was formed. Away back in 1841, Martin Jude and others sought for one National Association, and Alexander Macdonald, from 1863, also endeavoured to bring closer unity amongst the British miners; but, after his death, different opinions on the question of sliding scales and the fixing of an 8-hour day by law caused trouble, and from 1885 to 1888, strong action was taken by the two schools of thought, and in September, 1888, a Conference was held at Manchester when this great Federation was formed with a membership of 36,000. By 1893, the membership had increased to 200,000, at a time when the total number of persons employed in and about our mines would be about 650,000. By 1900, it had grown

to 449,000, when the number of mineworkers had increased to about 750,000. Thus its leaders saw it increase in numbers, and power and district after district join, and an 8-hour day eventually established by law.

Then, in 1912, there came our successful fight for a minimum wage for mine-workers below ground. At that period, we had a membership of 586,000, but there were about 1,000,000 persons working in the coal industry. Since that important year, our Federation has had some stormy experiences, but the aim of its leaders has ever been towards a closer union on national lines, for they realised that the passing years made more clear that both production and distribution required a change from the old system. We reached our highest point in membership in 1921, with over 900,000 members, and the same year saw the National Agreement established; and from that period, although unpleasant, it is instructive to trace the variation in membership, and in the number of those employed in coal mining. Sometimes both men and their Associations may learn important lessons in the hard school of experience, which should be of great service in the future.

From 1880 to 1920, the coal trade increased, and there was a corresponding increase in the mining population, as in the latter year there would be about 1,200,000 persons engaged in the British coalfields. Thereafter, came a great change in wages, employment and membership of the Federation, and by the year 1925, we had lost about 150,000 members, although the White Paper issued by the Mines Department still showed 1,045,997 persons employed in mining, while last December, our membership was just over 500,000, the number employed had fallen by over 307,000, the White Paper giving 734,406 as the number then employed.

I believe we have now reached low water mark, as reports from District Associations show increase in membership, which in time will be reflected in our Federation if only we could do our utmost to enrol in our ranks all who are entitled to be with us. I have long held the opinion that, as the householder is compelled to appear on the rate books, so each worker should appear on the Union books, and on our books as a Federation should appear the names and contributions of all mine-workers.

TABLE IV

	<i>Size of Family</i>			
	<i>1 Man, wife, 1 child aged 2 years</i>	<i>2 Man, wife, 2 children aged 2 and 4 years</i>	<i>3 Man, wife, 3 children aged 2, 4 and 6 years</i>	<i>4 Man, wife, 4 children aged 4, 6, 9 and 14 years</i>
	<i>s. d.</i>	<i>s. d.</i>	<i>s. d.</i>	<i>s. d.</i>
Food	16 0	19 8	23 6	31 1
Fuel and Light	5 0	5 0	5 0	5 0
Doctor's Club	0 9	0 9	0 9	0 9
Household Renewals and Cleaning Materials ..	2 0	2 0	2 0	2 0
Insurances	2 6	2 6	2 6	2 6
Clothing	4 0	5 0	6 0	7 0
Rent	7 6	9 6	9 6	11 6
	37 9	44 5	49 3	59 10

These figures show how hard must be the lot of our people, for there are thousands in every district who receive as wages less than £2 per week, which has been clearly shown as below a just standard.

Now, when we come to deal with the question of people employed at our mines we are engaged on an immense task, as there are so many factors to consider: overtime, shorter hours of labour, displacement of men by machinery, export and home trade, the question of oil from coal, the selling price of coal and the general distribution of the coal we produce. And when we do undertake the examination of any of these questions, we soon realise we can only deal with them on National and some even on international lines, as a consequence of the changes which the world has witnessed in its commerce and industries during the last twenty-five years. Nevertheless, in spite of all the forces against us and the dark days through which we are passing, I say to you, be of good courage. Our industry is still a great national asset, and in the future science and research will make it still more needful in the interests of the nation. If we continue in our perseverance and endurance, improvement will come, when we shall secure a higher wage and a shorter working day, with improved conditions generally. I hope we shall all remember that they who best know how to wait are those to whom success will come.

THE INTERNATIONAL OUTLOOK

The leaders of the nations have during the last year followed on the lines of previous years with their numberless Conferences, long conversations and statements, and, in the end a great deal of misunderstanding and no real results for the general welfare of the people either towards peace or improved trade. Another nation has come under Dictatorship as a result of the poor mistrusting and shooting each other. Let us hope the time is drawing near when the working people will trust each other and stand firmly together in endeavouring to remove those rulers who, age after age, have dominated and held down the people chiefly by the power of the sword. We must not expect any real peace under the present European rules. They can, however, be removed when the people firmly unite and proclaim in no uncertain manner their desire for peace, for we have very strong evidence that until the working people control the Governments of the nations we shall not make any real progress on the hours and other labour questions internationally.

In June last, representatives of employers, workers and Governments from various nations were sent to Geneva to deal with the question of a 40-hour week and their deliberations continued for three weeks. The result was a report to the Governing Body of the I.L.O.

Then we remember the Convention of 1931, on the shorter working time for mineworkers, and how nation after nation put in objections purporting to prove that it could not be carried out. Last month, representatives of these nations met in Geneva and endeavoured to reach a settlement. The International miners asked for the Convention to be ratified; but the mineowners refused, and said that if hours were reduced wages would also be reduced. The Governments put forward the question of revision of the 1931 Convention. Amongst other changes they sought was Sunday work, continuous working shifts, and the question of spread-over; and we found our motion for the ratification of the Convention turned down. The only motion passed was as follows:—

“The meeting instructs the Office to communicate to the Governing Body the record of the sittings of the meeting, in order that the Governing Body may be informed of all arguments brought forward by the members of the three groups at the meeting.”

So again, delay governed the situation; Governments and employers, which have no desire to alter the present system in favour of International arrangements on hours, voting down the workers' representatives. However, we must still work on for co-operation internationally, because the passing years show very clearly that the nations must work together if progress both in peace and in industries is to be achieved. At the present time, many nations are under the power of Dictatorships, which, in the long run, can never be for the general welfare, as the liberty of

the people must be recognised and government by the people established before the nations are able to work together for the general well-being of mankind.

This will be my last address as President of this great Federation. My term of office has been short, but I have endeavoured here, as in all my public work, to serve the people to whom I belong. I can only hope that those who follow will also seek the general good of the miners, which is truly a noble object. I know of no occupation that calls for so much courage or endurance as the work in a coal mine, and one day better conditions and wages will, we trust, be secured. Let us, during this week, give our best consideration to the questions which appear on our Agenda, and respect the opinions put forward by others. I hope we shall each, both in this Conference and in our own districts, seek to improve the membership of our Unions; and, whenever we have the opportunity, do all in our power to send Labour men and women to represent us in the British House of Commons.