

## PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS

**Mr. W. LAWTHER (VICE-PRESIDENT)** : The next business is the President's Address, and I have great pleasure in asking our President to deliver his Presidential Address.

**Mr. J. JONES (PRESIDENT)** : FELLOW DELEGATES, in this, my second Presidential Address, my first duty must be to recall to your minds all those old friends and servants of our Federation who have passed from our midst during the past twelve months. Since our last Annual Conference, we have lost that dour fighter and steadfast friend, William Adamson, of Scotland; we have also lost those cultured and kindly men, James Gillians and George Shield, of Northumberland, and all our hearts are saddened by the reflection that never again will our Conferences be enlivened by the presence of that brilliant little man, Noah Ablett, of South Wales. We have now received information that W. Kibble, of the Midland Federation, who had been Treasurer of one District Organisation for no less than fifty years, has just died. Many other members of our Organisation have passed away during the past twelve months, and, if I do not mention these by name, it is not because they have any lesser place in our affections and esteem, but only because their names are too numerous to record separately. They include the many hundreds of our members who have lost their lives in the pits since our last Annual Conference, and the many active members of our Branch and Lodge Committees, who have died since that time. All these are in our thoughts to-day, and to the relatives we would offer our most sincere condolences. I would ask you to stand in your places for a few moments and silently pay your tribute to the worth and work of all these old comrades and friends.

## MR. TOM CAPE, M.P.

Having paid our sincere and reverend homage to those who have been called from us, may I now pay appropriate tribute to one still with us upon whom a signal and unique honour has been conferred. I refer to Mr. Tom Cape, M.P., who, during the year, has been the recipient of what, in my view, is the greatest honour which can be conferred on a man by the particular community he has served, that of honorary Freeman.

It falls to few men to receive such a distinction, and the fact that all sections, whose diverse interests he has watched as Parliamentary Representative and in other capacities, have seen fit to honour him in this way, affords all the justification I need in extending to him on your behalf sincere congratulations. May he long be spared, further, to justify this mark of esteem and mutual respect.

## THE WAGES CAMPAIGN

The past twelve months have been a most eventful period in the history of our Federation; when we met at Rhyl last year, its fortunes were on the ebb; the morale of the organisation had been badly shaken by the lethargy which had characterised our policy in the last few years, and to me, as to others, it had become obvious that the time had come when a great effort should be made to break this inertia and re-establish the morale and status of the organisation. Even more vital was the necessity of arresting the increasing poverty of our people and of bringing fresh hope to our mining families.

It was essential, however, that any movement which we might make should have a reasonable prospect of success, for a failure would have made the position much worse and might, indeed, have had the most disastrous consequences. In many respects, the circumstances were not propitious for a general wage advance. The employers would not speak to us nationally, and there were grave organisational weaknesses in certain of our districts; the industry also, was in a badly disorganised state and in certain districts its economic position was low. Nevertheless, long before last year's Conference, a careful consideration of all the possibilities and particularly the possibility of rapidly securing an improvement in pit-head revenues, had convinced me that, provided we worked loyally and unitedly together, a general wage advance was possible, and to me personally, therefore, the decision of last year's Conference was a source of deep gratification.

The course and conduct of the campaign are now matters of history which have already been fully reported upon by your Executive Committee, and I do not propose to go into those matters again to-day. I should like, however, to express our most sincere thanks to the British public for the sympathy they gave us during those critical months. In my view, the magnificent and unwavering support afforded the miners by practically the whole British public was unprecedented in our history, and the miners are deeply sensible of, and grateful for, that support, for they know, that, without it, they could not achieve even a small measure of success.

I would also like to thank all the people who directly assisted us during the campaign, both the voluntary workers and our own servants and members at headquarters and in the districts. All worked most devotedly and unsparingly to make our campaign a success, and we offer them our

most sincere thanks. To our headquarters' staff a special word of praise is due for the publicity material which formed so valuable and effective a feature of our work. And now as to the outcome of the campaign. You will, I feel sure, expect me to say something about the results which were achieved and about the developments which have occurred since the campaign ended.

One of the most valuable results of the campaign has been the improvement in the morale of the organisation. This is reflected in the higher membership of many of the district organisations and in the decided increase in the confidence of the members in the work and policy of the organisation. Some of the districts have made splendid progress during these last few months. The increases in membership in the various Districts range from 361 in one of the smallest areas to 15,000 in one of the largest. The approximate addition covering the whole of the Federation is from 30,000 to 35,000. Perhaps the most gratifying feature is the increase of membership in one particular district of over 1,000 members in spite of the embarrassing handicap of the continued activities of the so-called non-Political Union.

This improvement in membership and prestige is, perhaps, our most valuable achievement, for it augurs well for the future; we must never forget that further progress is to a large extent dependent upon, and conditioned by, the strength and morale of the organisation. But in addition to this we made further direct and indirect gains. The direct results of our campaign were :—

- (1) An aggregate wage increase of about £8,000,000 per annum and amounting, in many districts, to the biggest single advance since the days of coal control.
- (2) A pledge from the Government that the whole selling organisation of the coal industry would be overhauled and remodelled and that central selling schemes with national co-ordination and control would be inaugurated as and from July 1, 1936.
- (3) The recognition by the employers of our right to discuss with them all questions of general interest to the industry, not excluding general principles applicable to the determination of wages by district agreements, and the setting up of a National Joint Committee to implement this right.

Indirectly, we obtained through our wages campaign an undertaking to unify coal royalties under public ownership and control, a proposal which we have advocated for over twenty years, and in addition, a promise to set up a Royal Commission to inquire into the question of safety in the mines. When one considers our position at this time last year, it will be admitted, I think, that our campaign was not unfruitful, and that our determination to end the period of inaction was amply justified by the results we secured. But what of the future, what of the developments which have occurred since the campaign ended.

#### THE SELLING SCHEMES

The selling schemes could not, after all, be put into operation by July 1; undoubtedly, they have entailed an immense amount of work, and the delay of a month is of little significance when principles of so far-reaching

a character have to be operated. With the principle of central selling, our Federation is in full agreement; as I said to you last year, we advocated this before the Samuel Commission, and it had long become apparent that to leave the sale of their outputs in the hands of the individual concerns and rely merely on a system of minimum prices which were largely evaded, was no proper substitute for a real organisation of selling on collective principles. Therefore, a general acceptance by the Coal Industry of the principle of central selling was a development of the highest importance and one which we welcomed whole-heartedly.

It is one thing to accept a principle however, and quite another matter to put that principle into operation. We may find that in practice it has been accepted in modified form only, or that the extent of its adoption is in no way consonant with our own ideas; so it is with these selling schemes, the draft Orders of which have now been published. We find that as between one district and another there is a big difference in the method of operating these schemes. In some districts, a central organisation within the district will take over and sell all, or most, of the coal of the owners within the district, and the sale of coal by individual owners will cease. Other schemes would not appear to provide for central selling in this sense, but merely to confer on the District Executive Boards, a general control of the terms and condition of sale, leaving the actual selling still in the hands of individual concerns. The former scheme is more in accordance with our ideas of what should be done, and would appear to be a real commencement of the application of the principle; on the other hand, the latter type of scheme, seems little more than a general tightening up of the wholly inadequate provisions of Part I.

The present schemes, even the best of them, do not, in fact, in any way conform to our ideas of the extent to which the principle of central selling should be applied. Under these schemes, the factors and wholesale dealers will still be able to make their intermediate profits between producer and consumer and there may still be considerable overlapping and competition between district and district. The time must come when, apart from small retail supplies, every ton of coal consumed in this country shall be sold direct to the consumer by collective organisations belonging to the colliery undertaking itself. As far as the colliery areas are concerned, such organisations should extend their activities and sell not only the outputs within their particular areas, but the coal which comes into their areas from outside; the coal consumed within an area being supplied as far as possible from the collieries within that area before outside supplies are brought in. In the big centres of consumption outside the colliery areas, I see no reason why the coal industry should not set up its own selling organisations on a geographical basis, each organisation being responsible for sales over pre-defined areas and each area being given a share of the trade. The business of selling coal should not be divorced from the business of producing coal, and profit-making by independent middlemen, who have no interest in the actual production of coal, should gradually be eliminated. These are our ideas as to the objectives which should ultimately be attained. The present selling schemes do not take us very far in this direction, but still a start has to be made, and the adoption of central selling, even though it be in a modified form, and on an inadequate basis, is to be warmly welcomed.

The big coal-consuming industries have recently carried on a big agitation against the selling schemes, believing that the application of central selling will no longer enable them to buy cheap coal by playing one colliery off against another. In the past, these people have enjoyed a big consumers' surplus on their coal purchases, and one of the most encouraging developments of recent times has been the gradual change of attitude of many coalowners to the basic principles which should govern the sale of their product. Many of the owners no longer believe that the economic health of the coal industry is dependent upon their ability to keep down the level of wages and so maintain big supplies of cheap coal. They are beginning to agree with us that the first principle which should govern their price policy is the necessity of paying a proper wage to the men engaged in the industry, and, as we have seen, by the adoption of central selling schemes they are, to some extent, taking steps to safeguard this principle. For this change of attitude our Federation is chiefly responsible, and this is not the least of its achievements during the wages campaign. We hope the owners will hold fast to their new point of view, and that under no consideration will they consent to any proposal which may weaken or fail to give practical effect to this vital principle. Too long have the big utility concerns taken advantage of the disorganised state of the coal industry; they can no longer expect to do so, and in my view their attempt to deny the coal industry the power of eliminating unnecessary competition and of organising its selling arrangements on modern lines (benefits which they have long enjoyed themselves) was a wholly indefensible proceeding.

These remarks do not mean that our Federation thinks that the price of industrial coal can be indiscriminately and indefinitely increased. There is a vast difference between a reckless raising of prices against the consumer and a policy designed to secure an equitable level of prices and the elimination of waste and unnecessary competition in selling. We stand for the latter policy, for we know that any attempt recklessly to extract higher and higher prices from the consumer would merely invite disaster upon ourselves. There are other ways—sound ways—in which we can improve our position.

The general level of coal prices and the arrangements to be made for re-organising the sale of coal, have such a big and such a direct influence on the wages of our men that we have always felt that we should have direct representation on the Boards which are to be responsible for administering these schemes; under Part I of the 1930 Act, the Boards must be composed of coalowners' representatives only, and, therefore, we have requested the owners to join us in making representations to the Government for an amendment of the Act. This request has not been granted, and our Members of Parliament are now pursuing the matter in the House of Commons. We are confident that if the Federation were given representation on these Boards, our men would have greater confidence in the schemes, and we should be able to make a valuable contribution to the problems of the industry.

I must not leave the subject of selling agencies without re-assuring you that we shall thoroughly investigate the relationship of the schemes to the wages ascertainment, in order that we may completely satisfy ourselves that our men will receive their proper share of any benefits to be derived from these schemes. According to the provisions of the district agreements,

the results of selling agencies are excluded from the scope of the ascertainties, but during the discussion on the wages question we received a very definite assurance from the Government that our men would participate in any benefits which may accrue, and, personally, I do not anticipate that we shall have much difficulty in satisfying ourselves on that point. After all our efforts to bring these selling organisations into being, it would be monstrous, indeed, if our men were excluded from their benefits, and under no circumstances would we tolerate such a course.

#### NATIONAL JOINT CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

The National Committee of Owners' and Federation representatives has now been in being for some months, and at the moment are engaged in an investigation of certain principles of the wages agreements. Our purpose on this Committee is to work to the very utmost of our ability inside the industry for the economic upliftment of our men. It may take some time to obtain results, for it is first necessary to re-establish confidence between the two bodies, and we must not forget that there are many diehards among the owners who were bitterly opposed to giving any recognition to the Federation nationally, and most unwilling to meet our representatives. We have overcome those difficulties, but it is necessary to proceed with caution and to exercise some patience if we are to see any tangible results from our work. *If we possibly can, it is far better to work for our men inside the industry, rather than have to force improvement from outside the industry by methods ultimately injurious to both sides, for the spectacular methods we have been compelled to adopt in the past undoubtedly caused disturbance and uncertainty in the coal trade, and re-acted most unfavourably upon the industry's man power.*

We have, of course, our own views as to the economic order under which the producer will ultimately attain a full and freer life, and with you I sincerely believe that only by a planned economy under a Socialistic order of society will our full ideals ever be achieved; but we have to remember that the owners are in the saddle, and that the circumstances of the position compel us to use every possible agency to help our men; their problems are so pressing, and their burdens so heavy, that we should be utterly unworthy of their trust if we failed to avail ourselves of every possible means of helping them. But nothing I say here implies that the Federation forgoes its principles or its freedom in any degree whatsoever; we remain, as always, an absolutely free and independent organisation, retaining our complete liberty of independent action and agreeing on joint action with the owners only when the circumstances are such that we feel the interests of our men are best served in doing so. We have already disagreed with the owners on certain questions, and in particular on Part 1 of the Coal Mines Bill which was recently introduced into the House of Commons.

#### COAL MINES BILL

A very great deal of misconception has arisen as to the policy of the Federation on the Coal Mines Bill, and even in our own ranks doubts have been expressed as to whether the Federation had any definite point of view on the principle of amalgamations; I feel, therefore, that it is necessary for me to deal with the matter at some length.

The Federation has always very strongly advocated the scientific grouping of collieries so as to ensure that production is carried on in the most efficient and economical way, and it has always recognised that this could not be brought about except by unifying colliery ownership in some degree or other; we have recognised, in fact, that the multiplicity of colliery ownership was the basic cause of waste and inefficiency in production, and therefore we have always strongly supported any proposals which would make for unification of ownership. In our evidence to the Sankey Commission, we laid great stress on the importance of the evidence given by Sir Richard Redmayne, then Chief Inspector of Mines, who was the chief technical advocate of scientific grouping, and our technical case for the reorganisation of the mines was very largely based on similar facts and arguments. In the interim report of our representatives special attention was drawn to these arguments and they were used not only to support our general case for the reorganisation of the mines but for the purpose of showing that they should be considered in relation to the capacity of the industry to pay higher wages, meaning that our claim for higher wages should be considered in relation not only to the financial position of the industry as revealed by current statistics, but to the possibilities of the industry if reorganisation was put into operation.

At the Samuel Commission we reiterated our views as to the evils arising from a multiplicity of colliery ownerships, and, although at this Inquiry Sir Richard Redmayne did not deal in detail with the subject of colliery grouping, he reaffirmed in general terms the view previously expressed to the Sankey Commission, and, on our part, our representatives were careful to make him repeat, by question and answer, the detail of that evidence.

Up to the time of the Samuel Commission, therefore, the Federation were strongly committed to the principle of colliery unification, although it is true that up to then we had always associated the question with our general case for the socialisation of the mines. Immediately after the Samuel Commission, however, the question was presented to the Federation in the following form: supposing, we were asked, you cannot get full nationalisation of the mines would you then be in favour of some measure of unification under the present régime? Our answer was clearly and unequivocally made to the Tory Government of 1926 in the reply we made to the recommendation of the Samuel Commission. The recommendation and the reply were as follows:—

#### AMALGAMATIONS OF EXISTING MINES

##### *Recommendation*

The amalgamation of many of the present small units of production is both desirable and practicable. This may often be effected from within, but in many cases it will only take place if outside assistance is given. Any general measure of compulsory amalgamation on arbitrary lines would be mischievous; the action to be taken should be elastic and should enable each case to be treated individually. The State as mineral owner will be able to promote desirable

##### *Miners' Reply*

Failing nationalisation of the industry, which they hold to be the policy most in accord with the public interest, the miners agree with the principle of amalgamations. They feel confident, however, that no such amalgamations will take place unless they are *made compulsory* after a Government Inquiry has decided what

*Recommendation*

amalgamation when granting new leases or renewing old ones. Legislation should provide for a compulsory transfer of interests under existing leases where desirable amalgamations are prevented by the dissent of some of the parties or their unreasonable claims. Existing leases would not otherwise be affected.

*Miners' Reply*

amalgamations should be established. The miners, therefore, think that the Commission's Report is not sufficiently definite in character to achieve the object aimed at. They also desire to point out that where labour is displaced by reason of these amalgamations, provision should be made in such cases, as suggested by the Commission. (*See pages 230-1.*) The Government should be ready to take all practicable measures for the assistance of any labour which may be displaced.

That reply was given to the Government, and to the country, as the considered view of the Federation on the principle of amalgamations under the present régime. There was no ambiguity about it; it said, in effect, that if we cannot get nationalisation, we do at least want some measure of colliery unification, but we do not think that this will be forthcoming unless some compulsion is put upon the colliery owners. Now the legislative origin of the Coal Mines Bill was not, as is so often supposed, the Coal Mines Act of 1930, but this recommendation of the Samuel Commission to which I have just referred, in consequence of which the Mining Industry Act of 1926 was passed. The Tory Government of 1926 did not, however, accept our view that compulsion was necessary, and the 1926 Act was little more than a tame measure designed to further amalgamations on a voluntary basis.

Little was done voluntarily, and the next stage in the history of this question was the passage of the Coal Mines Act, 1930, by the Labour Government of that day. It is true that originally the Act did not include any provisions relating to amalgamations, but this was not because the Labour Government did not favour the principle, but because they had to rely on Tory and Liberal votes to get their measures passed. When, however, during the course of the Bill in Parliament, the Liberal Party adopted the view expressed by the Federation four years earlier, and pointed out that as little had been done on a voluntary basis, compulsion was now necessary, the Labour Government readily accepted that position. The only criticism made by the Federation at that time was that the proposals did not go far enough and did not, in fact, go as far as the proposals for district unification proposed by Sir Arthur Duckham to the Sankey Commission.

It has now been found that under the Coal Mines Act of 1930, the Re-organisation Commission do not possess the powers Parliament intended they should possess under the Act of 1930, and the recent Bill therefore was no more than a measure designed to give to the Commission the powers which were thought to be inherent in the Act of 1930. So much for the history of amalgamations. What about the merits of the question?

In an admirable statement issued by our Secretary in March, 1934, entitled "Coal Trade Policy," there was set out the adverse effects of multiple ownership in the following words:—

"Several Royal Commissions and other statutory bodies have inquired into the industry and have made their reports. The Sankey Commission and the Samuel Commission both made exhaustive inquiries, and, later, the Lewis Committee made a special investigation into the marketing side of the industry. All these bodies confirmed a view which had long been held by miners and others closely associated with the industry; they found that the industry had failed, both in the production and in the marketing of coal, to take advantage of the benefits to be derived from co-operative effort, and that *the existing practice, whereby thousands of separate colliery concerns were given complete freedom to produce and compete one with the other, seriously lowered the economic position of the industry.*"

In that same statement which was widely circulated and generally appreciated, the policy of the Federation was set out with the utmost clarity in the following terms:—

*"The Federation has always realised the harmful effect on wages of artificially keeping old and out-of-date collieries in production, but has always emphatically refuted the view that these should be eliminated by the free play of economic forces. The problem here was gradually to close down the least efficient concerns (having regard to the social problems involved) while retaining for the industry the great benefits of regulated sale and production. The provision for the sale and purchase of quotas should not have been included in the Act which should have compelled the adoption of schemes for the gradual elimination of the old collieries."*

Our reasons for advocating the unification of colliery ownerships were also enumerated in the report of our representatives at the Sankey Commission under the following heads:—

- (1) Prevention of competition.
- (2) Control of freights.
- (3) Economy of administration.
- (4) Provision of capital allowing of quicker and more extensive development of backward mines.
- (5) More advantageous purchase of materials.
- (6) Reduction of colliery consumption.
- (7) More harmonious relations between the workmen and the operators due to steadier work and adequate remuneration of workmen.
- (8) Obliteration to a great extent of vested interests and middlemen.
- (9) Unification of the best knowledge and skill leading to greater interchange of ideas and comparison of methods.

It will be observed that, in the main, these reasons relate to the necessity of unifying colliery ownership as a means of increasing the productive and administrative efficiency of the industry. It was our view that this could not be achieved so long as the collieries were owned by such a large number of independent concerns; the question, we thought, was fundamental. But

while to-day, there is still the most urgent need to increase productive efficiency in the coal industry, there is, perhaps, greater need to secure a larger measure of concentration of production so as to neutralise the general policy of the owners under Part I of the 1930 Act. Under that Act it has been the policy of the owners to spread production as widely as possible, that is, to spread it over good, bad and indifferent pits alike; in consequence, many of the old and indifferent pits have been kept in production at the expense of the modern, well-equipped collieries, which have been compelled to work short time with a consequent increase of their overhead charges and a lowering of the general efficiency of the industry and its capacity to pay good wages. How, I would ask, is it possible to get good wages for our men, if the most modern and best equipped pits, and the pits which have been specially laid out and developed for production on a large scale, are compelled to work far below capacity to keep old and out-of-date collieries in production. Such a practice is wholly contrary to sound economy *and most destructive of the capacity of the industry to pay the best wages*. If persisted in, it must eventually create a huge bog of inefficiency which will suck down and drown good, bad and indifferent units alike. No one suggests that we shall not continue to control production, but surely our control should not be on such hopelessly antiquated and inefficient lines, but should be on the basis of concentrating production to a greater extent on those pits which are the better equipped, the better situated, and the better able to pay good wages.

There is a very sincere belief among many of our people that a policy of concentrating output would create further unemployment in the industry. That is a very natural, but, in my opinion, a very short-sighted view. Let us take the case of the South Wales coalfield where the policy of amalgamation has probably been developed to a greater extent than elsewhere, and which is so often quoted as an example of the dire effect of a policy of amalgamation upon the employment of the people. As practical people, we must admit that at any given time the employment available at the South Wales collieries is conditioned by the demand for Welsh coal, and we have very emphatically stated that the general demand cannot be substantially and permanently increased by lower prices. Clearly, therefore, the South Wales problem was either to spread the available work over the largest possible number of collieries or to concentrate that work on a smaller number of collieries. If the work had been spread, the coalfield generally would have worked short-time and would, in effect, have adopted a policy of making the miners keep the miners. I suggest that that is a policy to which we can lend no support; we have, in fact, most emphatically rejected such a policy when it has been presented to us in a direct form, but, unfortunately, we are apt to be misled when it operates in an indirect and more subtle way.

But the policy of spreading work has other evils. We must remember that while demand generally may be unresponsive to price changes, a single district can easily lose its place in relation to its competitors, and over a period, therefore, the effect of spreading output and consequentially increasing overhead charges, is to reduce the total employment available, and no one can seriously doubt that in an export area like South Wales, if production had not been concentrated, the general poverty of our South

Wales miners would have been even more grievous than has actually been the case.

There is another side to this question. Year after year, we have been urging the Government to deal with the problem of unemployment in the coalfields. We have urged the creation of new industries, the development of a great coal-oil industry and the institution of big schemes of public works. Does anyone think that the Government will ever squarely face the problem of the distressed areas so long as the policy of spreading the available work is persisted in? Surely those who have to undertake the terrible risks of underground work are entitled to get the highest possible wages for their labour, and the country, as a whole, should accept its responsibilities for the unemployed. We should not permit the poor to keep the poor. This does not mean that we agree with the extinction of large numbers of collieries, or should not press for compensation for our men; nothing is more absurd than to suggest that the Coal Mines Bill means anything of that sort; I am here indicating only the general principles of our policy, and I say, unhesitatingly, that in my opinion the policy of unification is the only possible one for us in existing circumstances, and I hope we shall stick to it at all costs.

During the last few months the coalowners have embarked on a tremendous publicity campaign against the Bill. They sought to defeat it by every means in their power, and even went to the extent of requesting colliery shareholders to withdraw their support from the Tory Party if the Bill became law; and what do they make the basis of their opposition? Not the principle of amalgamations, *but their right to be free of all outside interference; they opposed the Bill because in their view it cut right across the principle of private ownership.* We all ardently desire the socialisation of the mines, but in view of these facts is it not transparently clear that in denouncing the Coal Mines Bill some of our people were making themselves the unconscious allies of the most reactionary elements amongst the coalowners and heavily discounting our case for the reorganisation of the mining industry? It is for these reasons that I felt constrained to deal with this matter at some length.

#### REORGANISATION OF THE FEDERATION

It is rather unfortunate that, at a time when some of our people have shown a lukewarmness towards the principle of unifying colliery ownerships, we should be engaged in the task of endeavouring to unify our own Federation. However, I believe it to be the firm desire of our members that this task should be taken in hand, and I hope, therefore, that the work will go forward without delay. The task of unifying the Federation into one organisation with central authority and control gives rise to some difficult problems, but I have no doubt that we shall overcome these difficulties and ultimately create an organisation which will be a source of pride to our men and which will give them even better service and greater protection than they enjoy to-day.

#### HEALTH AND SAFETY

You will have all read in the public press the reports of the proceedings of the Gresford Inquiry, and will have been able to follow, to some extent, the evidence which has been given as to the state of the pit immediately

preceding the disaster and the general state of discipline in regard to the observance of the Safety Regulations. As one of the assessors, it is not competent for me to comment on the evidence at this stage, as the matter is still *sub judice*. We are, however, deeply indebted to Sir Stafford Cripps, K.C., for his masterly analysis of the evidence and to our own representatives for their determined efforts to probe to the utmost the causes of this great disaster. We are also indebted to them all for their bold, uncompromising attitude to questions which are of the very first importance to safety in the mines. We hope that, in consequence of this terrible disaster, the Safety Regulations will be so tightened up and so effectively supervised that an explosion of this magnitude will be impossible in the future.

In this respect, the Royal Commission which is now sitting is bound to have some responsibility. Personally, I feel that a Royal Commission of this kind, with its academic debates and its long-drawn-out proceedings, is not the best instrument for achieving the end we all desire—a rapid overhauling of the Safety Regulations in the interests of our men—but we must hope for the best and we shall, of course, make the best possible use of it.

In regard to the health of our people, you will have noticed that last year the Home Secretary set up a Departmental Committee to inquire into the question of miners' nystagmus and that the Federation has submitted evidence to this Committee. The general purpose of our evidence was first to establish the vital and primary principle that all men, who, either totally or partially, suffer a loss of earning power as a result of contracting nystagmus, shall be entitled to compensation. Secondly, that every possible means shall be taken to ascertain and remove the causes of nystagmus, and, thirdly, that adequate treatment be afforded the sufferers and every means taken to facilitate their recovery.

The question of silicosis and other industrial diseases have also been dealt with by us during the year; it is a lamentable fact that it is still possible for our men to contract the most dangerous and painful diseases while following their work underground, and yet be unable to obtain some compensation for their loss and suffering, and we shall spare no possible effort to alter this most grievous state of affairs. Much has already been done by the Federation to make known the sufferings of our men from industrial diseases, and to obtain for them the small solace of monetary compensation, but much *remains* to be done, and we shall continue our work in this direction with unremitting zeal.

#### UNEMPLOYMENT AND UNEMPLOYMENT REGULATIONS

Thousands of our members are still subjected to the Means Test, and our Members of Parliament have recently drawn attention to the fact that the recent increases in wages were being taken into account in assessing family incomes under the Unemployment Insurance Acts. That is a proceeding to which there may be no alternative under the present law, but it must be our business to get this iniquitous law abolished, for the Means Test is one of the cruellest injustices ever inflicted upon our mining families and in countless cases it has caused the break-up of family life.

About eighteen months ago, as a result of the intense public indignation they evoked, the Government withdrew the Unemployment Assistance

Regulations, which, if they had been passed, would have caused great hardship to the unemployed, and since that time a "standstill" arrangement is supposed to have been in operation. We now know the nature of the new Regulations, and we must redouble our efforts and offer the most determined opposition to proposals which accentuate the cruel want and privation now being so patiently endured by those who, through no fault of their own, have the great misfortune to be unemployed.

In regard to the general problem of unemployment, I reiterate my firm conviction that this should be dealt with, not by a policy of compelling the poorest of our people to share their work and earnings; not by a policy of abandoning the stricken areas and uprooting the lives of our people by large-scale transfers to other areas; but by the creation of new industries within the special areas, the provision of special pensions, the raising of the school-leaving age, and by big schemes of public works. These have always been our policies, and they are the only humane, just, and sound policies.

#### AN APPEAL FOR UNITY AND CO-OPERATION

In this address I have, of necessity, dealt with matters of high policy which are the particular concern of the Federation centrally; these matters are of vital importance, but no less so is the daily work for the members which is so ably performed by our local and district Committees. In such matters as unemployment benefits, workmen's compensation claims, the making of price lists and local agreements, the payment of benefits and the general protection of members, the Federation offers to all mineworkers the most able and devoted service, and no praise can be too high for the splendid way in which our local officers and Committees carry out these onerous duties.

Only the other day I was reading the Annual Report of the Home Office on Workmen's Compensation, and I found again that the amount of compensation paid per person employed was far higher in mining than in any other industry, while in proportion to the numbers employed, the number of compensation cases which are dealt with in the mining industry was also higher than in any other industries.

The following are the figures:—

<i>Industry</i>	YEAR, 1934	
	<i>Amount of compensation paid per person employed</i>	<i>No. of compensation cases shown as a percentage of the number of persons employed</i>
	<i>s. d.</i>	<i>%</i>
Shipping .. .. .	31 2	5.16
Factories .. .. .	7 10	3.34
Docks .. .. .	48 11	10.56
Mines .. .. .	67 10	22.30
Quarries .. .. .	27 10	9.11
Constructional Work ..	22 6	5.05
Railways .. .. .	11 6	3.95

These figures show that the miners incur far greater risks in their daily work than other industrial workers, but they also give an indication of the tremendous amount of work done by our local officials on the question of compensation alone; incidentally, they show how essential it is for every mineworker to be a member of the Federation; and just as during the past year we have achieved notable results in the wider fields of national policy, so have we endeavoured to make our local services more and more efficient. In the future I hope we shall endeavour to link these services up with a national reorganisation of the Federation, and achieve better co-ordination, and a closer co-operation between the districts, so that eventually we may give to our members a service which will be unsurpassable in our Trade Union Movement. To this end I would urge every worker in and about the mines to become a member of the Federation. To the mineworker who says he cannot afford to be *in*, I would say he cannot afford to be *out*; his work, his wages, his safety, aye, his very life, are at the mercy of forces from which he can be saved only by close association with his fellow-workers; never was the need for a strong trade union organisation so great and so desperately urgent as to-day.

My final words must be to the colleagues in our movement with whom I have worked during the past year; inevitably, we have had some difference on policy, but in relation to the big issues involved, these differences have been comparatively small. I would, however, now appeal for a still greater spirit of goodwill and an even closer co-operation in our future work, and I would ask that this spirit of increased goodwill and increased co-operation should be extended to, and accepted by, every one of us.

We have still exceedingly complex problems before us, and difficult tasks to undertake. Our members look to us to bring about economic reconstruction, industrial improvement, and social advancement, objectives which can only be reached by a united and common endeavour. But given that measure of confidence and loyalty which I urge, we shall be well able to work effectively for the welfare of those we represent, and so be worthy of our men and the great organisation of which we are all so proud.