

PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS

Mr. LAWThER (VICE-PRESIDENT) : I have very much pleasure in calling upon Mr. Jones to deliver this, his fourth, Presidential Address. The delegates will receive copies immediately after the speech has been made.

Mr. J. JONES (PRESIDENT) :

FELLOW DELEGATES:

It is but a few months since we were assembled together at Blackpool on the occasion of our last Annual Conference, but since that time the Great Reaper has been at work in our ranks, and we have lost many

old friends and comrades who then shared our work and responsibilities. Guy Rowson, of Lancashire; D. L. Davies, of South Wales; Thomas Greenall, of Lancashire; Oliver Wright, of Derbyshire; J. Smith, of Group No. 1; Isaac Eccleston, of Cannock; and John Potts and Herbert Smith, of Yorkshire. All these were men of character, men whose loss will be deeply felt in the coalfields, and men whose worth and work will ever remain green in our memories. Some of these men were in the flower of their early manhood; others had lived long, hard and full lives; but all had one outstanding characteristic, both the young and the old. Both those whom we had sent to the House of Commons and those who were still in the coalfields had one central purpose in their lives—to *be of service to their fellows*. For this we honour them, and from the same ennobling fount we take inspiration and courage to go forward, in our separate ways striving to the utmost of our ability to further the interests of the men whom we are privileged to serve.

We have also to deplore the loss of many other old servants and members of the Federation, and particularly do we deplore the toll which continues to be taken of those who work in the pits. To all our old comrades, to all of those brave men who have lost their lives during the last twelve months, I would ask you to pay your tribute, and at the same time to offer your heart-felt sympathy to the bereaved families.

SAFETY IN MINES

Notwithstanding the invention of safety devices; despite the continual research which is being made into safety questions, this year we have again experienced one of those large-scale explosions which cause so much havoc in the coalfields, and bring such great sorrow in their wake. The shocking disaster at Duckmanton Colliery, Derbyshire, has made it imperative that the Royal Commission on Safety in Mines shall issue its Report without further delay. It is but natural that so important and so complex a question should be the subject of a most thorough investigation, but the Commission has now been in existence for nearly three years, and it is nearly two years since we submitted our own evidence to it. Further time must necessarily elapse before legislative effect can be given to such recommendations as the Commission may make, and we do earnestly hope, therefore, that its conclusions may soon be forthcoming. In the meantime, we are pleased that though our long sustained struggle for the compulsory adoption of an automatic gas detector in gaseous mines has not yet borne fruit, the regulations which have recently been issued, limited as their effect will be, are undoubtedly a step in the right direction, in that they do ensure systematic effort towards Gas Detection. They do not, however, go far enough, and as the proposed Regulations do not contain a provision for the compulsory

result and foredoomed to failure from the start. Rather, it would be better policy, I think, to concentrate on our own position. It may be said that we have already submitted a case to both the Government and the owners, but without result. I respectfully suggest that the Federation has not yet put up a reasoned case for a reduction of hours; true, we are indebted to the Secretary for the useful information which he compiled from various sources and submitted to us last year, but what we want now is a carefully reasoned and documented case for a reduction of hours in the light of modern mining conditions. I am confident that such a case would carry great weight with all thoughtful and progressive people and that it would provide a real basis to our work for a reduction of the working day.

COAL-OIL INDUSTRY

There are certain other problems before us which are no less pressing than the immediate questions of hours and wages. In the address I submitted to you at Rhyl some three years ago, I submitted an analysis of the forces which were at work in reducing the volume of mining employment: the supersession of coal by oil and other substitutes, the continual advance of technical processes for fuel economy, the development of foreign coalfields, the world-wide policy of self-sufficiency, and so on. It must not be forgotten that these forces are still at work and that their progress is being accelerated day by day. At present their effect is masked by the demand for coal caused by the re-armament programme and by the general improvement in trade which has taken place in the last few years. But the re-armament programme will not last for ever and grave fears are now entertained that a recession in trade has already begun; but even now we have a great unemployment problem. *What will the position be in a few years time?* Is it not our imperative duty to the men we represent to do everything possible to meet the situation which must inevitably arise? We should formulate our own plans for meeting such a situation and press them upon the Government at every conceivable opportunity; I say emphatically that self-help is the best help and that it is our plain duty to visualise and plan now for the great problems which must inevitably confront the mining communities.

It is clear that in future coal will be regarded more as the raw material for the manufacture of other products than as a material for immediate use, and here obviously the development of a big coal-oil industry is to us a matter of the first importance, as such a development would be the means of employment in the coal industry to an almost unlimited extent. On this question the report of the Falmouth Committee is unpromising but we have to remember that the Falmouth Committee examined this question mainly from the narrow angle of cost—a factor which must necessarily change—and

not from the wider aspects of the advantages of such a development to the coal industry and to the social and economic life of the country. The question has now been examined from these wider aspects by a Committee of our Mining Members of Parliament, and their views and conclusions have recently been published by the Labour Party in the pamphlet "Labour's Plan for Oil from Coal." I most heartily commend this work; we cannot give too much time and thought to this all-important question, and I say unhesitatingly that if the Federation is to take its proper place in the industry and fulfil its responsibilities to its members, it must take up this question and prosecute it with all the power at its command. The technical difficulties of producing oil from coal have now been overcome; but there remains the difficult task of convincing the country that the development of a big coal-oil industry in this country, with its attendant by-products, would be in the national interests after due consideration is given to all the factors involved in it. We believe deeply and sincerely that such a development *would be* in the interests not only of the coal industry but of the country as a whole, and I sincerely hope that the Federation will spare no effort to convince the country of this truth.

DISTRIBUTION OF COAL

We are pleased to note that the Government has appointed a Committee to inquire into the costs of coal distribution with particular reference to the difference between the pit-head price and the price charged to the domestic consumer. As our wages are largely governed by the pit-head proceeds of the industry, which in turn are greatly influenced by the costs of distribution, it is clear that this is a matter of great importance to us. In presenting its evidence to the Committee the Federation will need, however, to make the closest possible study of *organisation* in regard to both transport and distribution. To this problem of distribution I will return later. This question is also bound up with the question of organisation, and if it is not approached from this angle then, as was shown by the Duncan and other inquiries, the results are not likely to afford us any great satisfaction.

TRANSFORMATION OF THE M.F.G.B. INTO ONE NATIONAL UNION

These then are some of the tasks which lie immediately ahead of us. They are great tasks, and to cope with them successfully we shall require to be a closer, a more united force. They are, indeed, fitting tasks for the great new organisation which we now hope to bring into being. Our proposals in that respect have already been put before you by the Executive Committee, and as they are likely to be long and anxiously debated at the Conference I will not comment upon them here. I would emphasise, however, that no organisation can hope successfully to surmount these great tasks unless it has a positive

frequency and extent of "Unconstitutional stoppages" in the Industry. It is fallaciously believed that these tactics afford a means of more promptly redressing grievances, but the so-called policy of "Direct Action" as a method of adjusting differences between employer and employee has been proved to be both futile and obsolete; indeed, I would go further. "Direct Action" is the sure and certain precursor of Trades Union reaction, since such a practice in the end inevitably imposes definite restraints upon advantageous collective bargaining.

For, collective bargaining becomes impossible, unless undertakings entered into are supported by loyal acceptance and honourable adherence. Frequently recurring unconstitutional stoppages undermine the influence and strength of a Trades Union; often humiliate responsible officials; always enfeeble the prospect of successful negotiation and accommodating adjustment; and seldom fail to alienate public opinion. The direct actionist is a renouncer of good faith; a repudiator of rules, agreements and bargains; and a positive danger to the development of democratic and constitutional procedure. To cease work contrary to official advice and in defiance of recognised constitutional practice, especially whilst negotiations are either possible or pending, is detrimental both to the interests of the worker himself and to the undertaking on which he depends for a livelihood.

I make no apology for referring to this perhaps not too popular subject, for at a time when factors are shaping themselves more favourably toward the prospect of improvement in the conditions of life and labour in the Mining Industry, a frank recognition of such internal tendencies as may result in retarding progress or even deny to us the rewards of sustained organised endeavour, cannot but be helpful. My only desire is that in assessing our strength we should not be unmindful of our weaknesses. Given mutual understanding and effective co-operation we can make our appropriate contribution to the problems still confronting the Industry. By unity of purpose and combined endeavour we can make further constructive efforts to influence overdue economic changes and industrial advancement by which, and through which, the social improvement and well-being of our membership must be attained.