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factor in the Scotch settlement. Flushed with this sense of power and victory, the miners are sure to use the twentieth rule in future whenever wages in any district are attacked. Hence the country is sure to be faced, sooner or later, with the terrible prospect of a national stoppage of our coal supplies, with its concomitant paralysis of national industry.

T. I. MARDY JONES

CENTRAL POOR LAW CONFERENCE. REPORT OF THE PROCEEDINGS
OF THE 37TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE, APRIL, 1909.¹

THE Conference of Guardians and officials which met at the Guildhall in April last was of special importance. It was entirely devoted to a discussion of the recommendations of the Royal Commission. Delegates were present from 271 Unions, and, in addition, there were a number of elected and co-opted representatives. Four papers were read. Mr. Bentham, of Bradford, put forward a summary of the Majority Report, of which he was one of the signatories. Mr. Manton, the Chairman of the Birmingham Board, dealt with the administrative proposals from the standpoint of a "progressive" Guardian. The Rev. G. Propert, of Fulham, discussed principles and methods of relief, voicing strict C.O.S. doctrine, and Mr. Leach, the Rochdale Clerk, reviewed the unemployment proposals of the Majority, and spent most of his time contending that, where they were not contradictory, they were superfluous. The reading of the papers was followed by a discussion, in which between forty and fifty delegates took part.

Neither papers nor speeches make any fresh contribution to the solution of specific problems. The proceedings are only important as revealing the attitude of leading Guardians to proposed changes. The Guardians would seem to be unanimous against their transformation into "authorities not directly elected for Poor Law purposes." "They were as one against Mr. Bentham." "If the thin end of the wedge were got in, Guardians, as such, were ruined." Next, almost every speaker had something to say against the Local Government Board. Either it did not advise enough and in time, or it interfered too much. Thirdly, many of the speakers were not aware of anything in the Poor Law calling for radical change. "There was no reason in the world . . . why Boards of Guardians up and down the country should be

¹ London : P. S. King and Son. Pp. xv + 187. 1s. net.

interfered with." Only one member, so far as we have observed, called attention to what Dr. Bernard Bosanquet has characterised as "perhaps the most unexpected and terrible scandal revealed by the two reports"—the treatment of the 200,000 children who are receiving outdoor relief. Others contended that many Boards had already carried out the suggested improvements or would have done so but for the dead hand of the Local Government Board. What was wanted, they said, was to bring "the laggards to the level of the progressive Boards." Mr. Proport held that "where the Poor Law is administered on sound principles" there is "scarcely any necessity whatever for reform." Needless to add, the progressive Boards are not run on these "sound principles." The same speaker regretted the breaking down of "the clearly-defined boundary 'Destitution,'" while another Guardian asserted that the use of this word "had long been mere cant," and Mr. Bentham declared that it had been "entirely misunderstood" in different parts of the country. Mr. Proport does not believe in a "curative and restorative" Poor Law, and is amazed to find the Majority urging that administration in future is to be less deterrent and more elastic. "Surely," he exclaims aghast, "it was the stretching of the law which brought about the very Commission we are now discussing." One Guardian is astonished to hear of institutions which had cost £400 per bed, while his own Union had found £80 sufficient for up-to-date provision, and he wonders what the Local Government Board has been doing. Mr. Bentham urges that the administrative machinery proposed by the Majority would arrest the municipalisation of the various services which has been going on apace, while Mr. Manton has no hesitation in facing the alternative of distribution to be found in the Minority Report, in preference to the creation of another authority, "badly constituted and worse controlled." The discussion of unemployment was very disappointing. Mr. Leach had no difficulty in discovering signs of haste and inconsistency in the treatment of the subject by the Majority, and he did not think the Minority Report worth discussing. His position is doubtless typical of that of many officials. Believing all labour to be honourable that is honest, he asks "where are our carriers by land and water, our shopmen or clerks to come from, if boys do not on leaving school go as errand boys or van boys?" and so forth. "Is it reasonable to think that private employers are going to be parties to any conference held for the purpose of teaching them how to manage their own affairs?"

Only one or two speakers seemed to have any clear vision of

the true lines of cleavage between the two Reports. The President, Dr. Macnamara, in an admirable review of the general situation, speaking of the Minority Report, said, "It is, as I read it, an endeavour to combine the function of those who seek to remove causes with the function of those who seek to mitigate results. If fifty years ago we had sincerely tackled the slums and the insanitary dwellings of this country, I can imagine that the need for a good deal of our present expenditure of time and money on the physically and mentally unfit would not have arisen. . . . The obligation to reform is quite as imperative as the necessity to chasten." Mr. Manton quotes from the Minority Report the sentence, "It seemed to us of less importance to consider what is done to the existing paupers than to discover what is creating them," and urges that this is what progressive Guardians have been pressing in vain upon the Local Government Board.

No better justification of the need for overhauling the Poor Law system could be desired than is to be found in the conflicting opinions revealed in these pages. The most dangerous symptom is the self-complacency of so many of the delegates. One lady did indeed appeal to the audience "to become super-guardians for the moment," but such magical changes are rare and difficult. Perhaps by the next annual conference the Majority Report and the evidence on which it is based will have forced an entry more completely into the parochial mind. Perhaps also by that time some of the Guardians, greatly daring, will have ventured to read the Minority Report.

THOMAS JONES

RECENT OFFICIAL PAPERS.

Reports from the Select Committee on the Application of Sinking Funds in Exercise of Borrowing Powers. (Commons' Papers, 193 and 372, 1909.)

It has recently been a common complaint of critics of local finance, and especially of opponents of municipal trading, that many corporations have evaded their duty of providing sinking funds by the "ingenious manœuvre"¹ or "most ill-judged Parliamentary slip"² of utilising the money in connection with further borrowings. Witnesses before the Committee on Municipal Trad-

¹ Porter, *The Dangers of Municipal Trading*, p. 184; cf. *ECONOMIC JOURNAL*, xvii, p. 389.

² Arthur Kay, *Municipal Trading*, p. 23.