

is an exceedingly intricate one, involving several grades of remuneration according to the nature of the work of each man, but, broadly speaking, it may be said that the men demanded an increase of fifty per cent. over the rates which had been fixed as far back as 1879.¹⁰ Mr. Runciman's proposals were in the nature of a compromise, and found favour with neither side.

Things quickly drifted from bad to worse, the miners rejected the Board of Trade's terms, and by the beginning of the second week in July, over 150,000 men were out, and the South Wales coal trade was completely paralysed. On July 13 the Government shot its last bolt, and by a Royal Proclamation under the terms of the Munitions Act it was declared that to go on strike, or to remain out on strike was a criminal offence against the realm. The Miners' Federation of Great Britain advised the men to return to work, the men refused, and for the first time England stood aghast at a great body of men calmly and deliberately defying the laws, with bitterness in their hearts at what they considered was the open siding of the Government with the masters. The feelings prevalent among the miners were quite frankly set forth by the *Times* on July 19: "The belief that the Colliery Companies are making fabulous fortunes out of the high prices of coal is universal among the strikers. They have no quarrel with the government, they say. The application of the Munitions Act with its penal provision has irritated them, and they have declared by formal resolution that if action be taken against any man, delegate or member of the local committees, they will refuse to work until that action is recalled. But what really sticks in their throats is the idea that they are being exploited by the coal owners. They are convinced that their demands are just and reasonable, and that the owners are grasping masters. 'You call us unpatriotic,' they say, 'because we will not withdraw our demands; why don't you call the owners unpatriotic because they will not grant our demands?' Nothing could be more appalling than the bitterness towards the masters: it is not the growth of weeks or of months, but of years. The owners, they say, have resisted every attempt to secure better or safer conditions for the men, and now they are taking advantage of the national emergency to resist demands which, had there been no war, would have been secured

¹⁰The agreement of 1879 set up a sliding scale of wages, varying with the price of coal, the maximum price contemplated at that time being fourteen shillings and nine pence per ton. But when steam coal was selling to such large buyers as the Admiralty for £1. 5. 0 per ton, it was quite evident that the old sliding scale was entirely out of date.