TERMINATION OF THE GENERAL STRIKE.

STENOGRAPHIC NOTES of a meeting held at 10, Downing Street, S.W.1., on Wednesday, May 12th, 1926, at 12.20 p.m.

THE FOLLOWING WERE PRESENT:—

The Rt. Hon. Stanley Baldwin, M.P.,
(Prime Minister).

The Rt. Hon. Sir L. Worthington-Evans, Bart., G.B.E., M.P.,
(Secretary of State for War).

The Rt. Hon. The Earl of Birkenhead,
(Secretary of State for India).

The Rt. Hon. W.C. Etridge, M.P.,
(First Lord of the Admiralty).

The Rt. Hon. Neville Chamberlain, M.P.,
(Minister of Health).

The Rt. Hon. Sir Arthur Steel-Maitland, Bart., M.P.,
(Minister of Labour).

Col. The Rt. Hon. G.R. Lane-Fox, K.P.,
(Secretary for Lines).

Sir Horace J. Wilson, K.C.B., C.B.E.,
(Secretary, Ministry of Labour).

Mr. E.A. Gowers, C.B.,
(Permanent Under Secretary, Mines Department).

Mr. T. Jones,
(Deputy Secretary, Cabinet Offices).

THE TRADES UNION CONGRESS GENERAL COUNCIL.

Mr. Arthur Pugh (Chairman).

Mr. A.B. Swales (Vice-Chairman).

Mr. W.H. Citrine (Acting General Secretary).

(And other members).
Mr. Punch: Well, sir, when we separated something over a week ago it was of course recognised and expressed on both sides that the ultimate end would be a settlement of this matter by negotiations and although the conflict has been very much extended and developments have taken place since then clearly both sides and all sides and all parties have had in view, they must have had, the ultimate arrangements that would have to be made to bring this trouble to a successful end. We, of course, like yourself, have had despite whatever developments might have taken place, everybody has had to direct their thoughts in that channel and to use such opportunities as presented themselves and such public opinion that existed with a view to effecting a resumption of negotiations. In that respect, sir, your contribution was made in the statement delivered to the people of the country through the wireless stations. That was something which we on our side certainly could not ignore. On the other hand we had been exploring other possibilities with full knowledge that whatever happened and however long the present position lasted or whatever might be its consequences in the long run the process of negotiations would have to be gone through. Well, as a result of developments in that direction and the possibilities that we see in getting back to negotiations and your assurance, speaking for the general community of citizens as a whole, that no steps should be left unturned to get back to negotiations, we are here today, sir, to say that this general strike is to be terminated forthwith in order that negotiations may proceed and we can only hope may proceed in a manner which will bring about a satisfactory
settlement. That is the announcement which my General Council is empowered to make.

PRIME MINISTER: That is the general strike is to be called off forthwith?

MR. PUGH: Forthwith. That means immediately. There is just a point about the actual arrangement, but that is in effect what it means. It is merely a matter of the best way to get it done with the least confusion.

PRIME MINISTER: I mean there would be a great deal of work for both of us to do. All I would say in answer to that is I thank God for your decision and I would only say now, I do not think it is a moment for lengthy discussion, I only say now I accept fully and confirm fully all I have said in the last two paragraphs of my broadcasted message. I shall call my Cabinet together forthwith, report to them what you have said and I shall lose no time in using every endeavour to get the two contending parties together and do all I can to ensure a just and lasting settlement. I hope it may be possible before long to make a statement of the lines on which we hope to accomplish that end.

MR. THOMAS: Only one or two of us wish to say anything to you and it will be very brief. You answered us in the way we knew you would answer us, namely, that just as you recognise we have done a big thing in accepting the responsibility we felt sure the big thing would be responded to in a big way. We are satisfied all too well that it will not be a day or two or a week in which the dislocation and difficulty can be put right, but whatever may be the view of the merits of the dispute now ending there is common agreement that assistance from those who were opposing parties ten minutes ago is essential to rectify and make good and start things on the right road again. Your assistance in
that is necessary, our assistance is necessary. We intend to give it and in doing that we believe you can help. We want you to help us in that direction - I never liked the word war and I do not want to use it, but we want your help when this dispute is ended. We trust your word as Prime Minister. We ask you to assist us in the way you only can assist us by asking employers and all others to make the position as easy and smooth as possible because the one thing we must not have is guerilla warfare. That must be avoided and in that both sides have to contribute immediately. Nothing could be worse than that this great decision which we have taken should be interpreted otherwise than as a general desire to do the right thing in a difficult moment for the industry of the nation.

MR. BEVIN: I think you will agree in the difficulties we have had before us, at least we have taken a great risk in calling the strike off. I want to urge it must not be regarded as an act of weakness but rather one of strength. I am not talking of strength of muscle and brawn but rather that it took a little courage to take the line we have done. I want to stress Mr. Thomas's point and ask you if you could tell us whether you are prepared to make a general request as head of the Government that facilities etcetera, many facilities for reinstatement and that kind of thing shall be given forthwith. The position is this. Some of the undertakings that are affected, of course, are affected by Associations which are not-at-able, otherwise are all over the country. When this goes out in the Press it may cause untold confusion, but if you could agree with us to make a declaration it would I think facilitate matters and employers no doubt have been acting at least in carrying out the spirit.
of the Government during the fight naturally and they would no doubt respond to a statement of that character and I would put it to you very strongly that that is one of the easiest ways of doing things. One of the reasons I want to put it to you is this. In a dislocation of this character it does affect production very much, especially in producing trades and if there is a resumption with a sort of good feeling then the thing gets back on to its usual footing very rapidly. If there is not then it does affect the restoration. I remember after the 1912 Strike when we were beaten Sir Joseph Broodbank went into it very carefully and the loss in output of transport was something like twenty-five per cent for some time, until the war. We do not want that kind of thing. We have had a row and it does upset things, but we are quite willing to co-operate with our men to repair the damage just as much as the employers, but the employers are the people who can facilitate that kind of feeling and I am sure they would respond to you if you issued that as a statement. It would be very helpful to us before we left the building if we could have some indication in that direction because we shall have to send telegrams to Unions whose headquarters are not in London with whom we cannot converse and coupling with it a declaration from yourself would in a way give the lead as to how the things is to be approached. You said, sir, also you were going to call the parties together in order to effect a just settlement. Now we have called our show off and work will be resuming pretty quickly. I do not know whether I am overtsepping the bounds but I would like you to give me an idea of whether that means that there is to be a resumption of the mining operations with us or whether all the negotiations have to be carried on while the miners still
remain out.

MR. THOMAS: That implies that we interpret your speech to mean what I am sure it did mean.

MR. BEVIN: It helped us to rise to the occasion. I thought personally - of course it is so difficult when you have to take it without conversing - I really felt in the event of our taking the lead in assuring you we were going to play the game and put our people back that it was going to be free and unfettered negotiation with the parties very speedily because thousands of our people cannot go back if the colliers are still out and if the colliers are still out it is going to make it extremely difficult to get a smooth running of the machine. These are the two points I wish to put to you.

PRIME MINISTER: Well, Mr. Bevin, I cannot say more here at this meeting now. I did not know what points you were going to raise or that anything would be said beyond the statement of Mr. Pugh. The point you have put is one I must consider and I will consider it at once. I would only say in my view the best thing to do is to get as quickly as possible into touch with the employers. I think that the quicker that is done the less friction there will be. You know my record. You know the object of my policy and I think you may trust me to consider what has been said with a view to seeing how best we can get the country quickly back into the condition in which we all want to see it. You will want my co-operation and I shall want yours to try and make good the damage done to the trade and try and make this country a little better and a happier place than it has been in recent years. That will be my steady endeavour and I look to all of you when we are through this for your co-operation in that. I
shall do my part and I have no doubt you will do yours. In regard to the second point there again I cannot say at this moment what will happen because I shall have to see the parties. My object, of course, is to get the mines started the first moment possible and get an agreement reached. I cannot say until I have seen them exactly what the lines will be upon which my object can best be attained, but you may rely on me and rely on the Cabinet that they will see no step is left unturned to accomplish that end. Now, Mr. Pugh, as I said before, we have both of us got a great deal to do and a great deal of anxious and difficult work and I think that the sooner you get to your work and the sooner I get to mine the better.

MR. PUGH: Yes, that sums up the position for the moment.

MR. BEVIN: I am a little persistent. I do not want to take up your time, but shall we be meeting on these two points soon?

PRIME MINISTER: I cannot say that, Mr. Bevin. I think it may be that whatever decision I come to the House of Commons may be the best place in which to say it. I cannot say at the moment whether the better thing would be to do it there or meet again, but we are going to consider right away what is best.

(The proceedings then terminated)

10, Downing Street, S.W.1.
12th May, 1926.