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Scottish Miners' Federation Annual Conference

The following motion was moved by Mr Thos Sullivan, Lanarkshire:- "That we continue to urge upon the Government the necessity of passing legislation for the regulation of the employment of unskilled labour in mines, especially the employment of unskilled foreign workmen, who do not understand the English language." He said that apart from the injury done by Polish workers through their lack of knowledge of the English language, they knew that foreign unskilled labour affected the British miners in the matter of wages.

Mr David Gilmour, Lanarkshire, said that since the last Conference in Edinburgh they had demonstrated that so far as trade unionism was concerned, they were willing to take up responsibilities for the foreign miners. In his district they brought out Poles on strike and a stronger or more determined body of men could not have been found fighting for their rights. The Poles remained on strike for eight months, and got their demand conceded. Therefore, from a trade union point of view, they had absolutely no reason to object to the introduction of foreign workers into the mines. Their objection was founded on the ground of safety.

Bailie Brown, Dalkeith, said he could not endorse what had been said by Mr Gilmour. He proposed to amend the resolution by the introduction of the following:- "That we continue to urge upon the Government the necessity of passing legislation for the regulation of employment of unskilled labour in mines and of prohibiting the importation of foreign workmen into the mines of this country." He said he was in full sympathy with the resolution, but he wanted the foreign miners to remain at home and work the mines there. He wanted them away whether they knew the language or not. The men whom he represented did not want the foreigners in the mines, because they believed that if they were not stopped from coming, in a short time there would not be labour enough for their native miners. He quoted figures to show that the coal trade had not responded as it ought to have responded to the boom in the iron and steel trade, and he was not optimistic as to the future. He believed in the open door to a certain extent, but he did not believe in allowing anybody to come in while they had a back door where their own people had to walk out. (Applause.) It was not right that foreigners should come in and take the work while our own people had to emigrate in order to live. He wanted to speak bluntly, and to say that he did not believe that 10 per cent of the miners wanted the Poles kept out because of the danger caused by them not knowing the language; the real reason was that the Poles were congesting the mines and producing more coal than was required. In Mid-Lothian two years ago there were not more than a dozen foreigners in the pits; to-day they were there in hundreds, and they were still coming.

Mr Cook, Clackmannan, seconded and after discussion the original resolution was carried by 47 votes to 27.