

A Seven-Day Journal

Safety in Mines.

THE Royal Commission on Safety in Coal Mines held a resumed sitting at Montagu House, Whitehall, on Monday last, March 9th, under the presidency of Lord Rockley, the chairman. Further evidence to that reported in a Journal note last week was given by Mr. J. R. Felton, Divisional Inspector of Mines for the North Midlands, and by Mr. H. J. Humphrys, Divisional Inspector of Mines for Yorkshire. Mr. Felton pointed out that about 45 per cent. of all underground accidents were deemed to have been preventable. The percentage for falls was 31 per cent. and for haulage 68 per cent. On the surface 45 per cent. of the accidents were preventable. The great majority of those accidents were not due to breach of regulations, but to lack of reasonable care and normal precautions. He suggested that safety officers might be appointed, particularly in the larger collieries. He attached great importance to safety classes for boys. He was not sure that it would be advisable to make attendance at such classes a condition of employment, but it should be compulsory to provide facilities for every boy at every colliery to attend such classes. In his evidence Mr. H. J. Humphrys pointed out that over 90 per cent. of the miners in Yorkshire worked in mines where danger from fire-damp was possible, and many of the mines, especially in the Doncaster district, were also liable to spontaneous combustion. The casualties from accidents in the Yorkshire division over the ten-year period 1925-1935 totalled 6743. Seventy-five per cent. were accidents due to falls of ground and haulage accidents. Dealing with organisation and management generally, Mr. Humphrys said it was suggested that, except in small mines, no person should be appointed to a position where executive control of the mine was exercised unless he was the holder of a first-class certificate. The holding of dual positions such as agent and manager was not desirable. He was in favour of the compulsory appointment of under-managers of large mines and officials with first and second-class certificates in charge of large shifts.

Obsolescence and Income Tax.

IN a letter on national expenditure and taxation addressed to the Chancellor of the Exchequer by the Association of British Chambers of Commerce, criticism is made of the methods at present in force for the valuation of machinery for income tax. The letter states that the Association is more firmly convinced than ever as to the necessity and urgency of some alteration in the provisions of the income tax Acts relating to obsolescence. Before the war obsolescence was not so important a factor as it has become in recent years; in fact, it is not too much to say that frequently obsolescence is now a more important consideration than wear and tear in arriving at profits. Obsolescence is a factor which must be taken into account in calculating cost throughout the period during which plant, machinery, &c., may be in use, and in the opinion of the Association, to have regard to it only when plant or machinery is scrapped or disposed of is opposed to sound commercial and accounting principles. The income tax Acts provide an annual allowance only for wear and tear and take no account of the obsolescence factor until plant and machinery is dismantled and disposed of, and then only if it is replaced. The Association therefore suggests that in place of an allowance merely in respect of "wear and tear" there should be given an allowance in respect of "depreciation," it being understood that this "depreciation" allowance is to cover obsolescence as well as wear and tear. When the allowances have reduced the cost of the plant or machinery to scrap value, no further allowances would be given, and to protect the revenue it may be provided that in the event of plant or machinery being disposed of at a price in excess of the written down value, such excess should be taken to credit of profit and loss account.

Telephone Trunk Calls.

IN reply to a question in the House of Commons on Monday, March 9th, the Postmaster-General, Major Tryon, announced that from May 1st the maximum charge for a three minutes trunk telephone call between any two places on the mainland of Great Britain will be 2s. 6d. between 5 a.m. and 7 p.m., and 1s. at other times. This is the chief feature of the revision of the telephone trunk tariff which also provides for reduced daytime charges for calls now costing 2s. 6d. or less. The proposals will involve the Post Office in a loss of revenue of £600,000 in the first full year, but it is believed that as in the case of the reductions made in 1934, the reduced charges will result in an increased use of the telephone. After the first three minutes, calls beyond 35 miles will still be chargeable in periods of one minute at one-third of the three-minute rates. The rates for fixed time calls and contract calls will be reduced in proportion to those for ordinary calls. Later in

the day Major Tryon announced that technical progress is gradually extending the distance up to which subscribers on an automatic exchange can obtain their own connections by dialling, the charges being recorded by automatic apparatus. The automatic system, he explained, is being extended and equipped to cater for the completion of calls up to 15 miles without the intervention of an operator, and to facilitate that process the Post Office is adjusting, to uniform levels, those charges for local calls which, under the present tariff, vary according to the time of day. Another interesting announcement was that some time this summer it is hoped to introduce in most parts of the country an automatic signal, something like the B.B.C. time signal, which, twelve seconds before the expiry of each three-minute period, will warn callers that their time is nearly up. It will be more accurate in timing than any humanly operated device can be, and subscribers will not be distracted from their business, as sometimes happens, when an operator suddenly announces "three minutes."

The Air Estimates.

ON Friday last, March 6th, the Air Estimates for 1936 were published. They amount to a gross total of £43,490,600, or £14,304,500 more than the Estimates for last year, excluding the provision which was made last month to cover the cost of measures arising out of the Italo-Abyssinian war. The new Estimates do not take into account the cost of the additional expansion mentioned in the White Paper on Defence, published last week, which will involve the addition of 250 aircraft to the first-line air defences, as this project will not be realised until after the end of the 1936 financial year. At the end of that year the Home Defence Force will amount to 1500 aircraft, with 270 first-line machines overseas and 220 in the Fleet Air Arm. Included in the vote for technical and warlike stores are the sums of £8,335,000 for aeroplanes and of £4,525,000 for engines. With spares the total under this head amounts to £14,680,000.

British Corporation Register.

AT the annual meeting of the British Corporation Register, held in Glasgow on Wednesday last, March 11th, the Chairman, Mr. Robert Clark, referred to the improved position of the Society and the healthier condition of the shipbuilding industry, both in this country and throughout the world. In a review of the rate of expansion of world tonnage, he said that had the pre-war rate of increase been maintained throughout and after the war period, the level of world tonnage in 1930 would have been normal. Since then it had fallen and was now practically stationary, so that unless a steady increase again developed, a revival of international trade would result in a shortage of tonnage and possible danger of a boom. He added that the shipping community was always ready to adopt improvements in construction or equipment which would lead to increased safety at sea, and he stressed the vital importance of protecting the hatchways and other openings which are necessary to the working of ships. With the improvements in protection elsewhere, modern ships would be almost unsinkable if hatch covers could neither float away nor be stove in, and every encouragement was being given to improvements in that direction. Mr. Maurice Denny, Chairman of the Technical Committee, referred to the contribution which welding had made to modern shipbuilding technique in Germany and Japan particularly, although we were not far behind in this country in a development which would ultimately result in the substitution of welding for riveting on a large scale. His Committee had concluded a long investigation into the factors affecting corrosion, and the Society's Rules had been modified to avoid non-uniformity in steel for all purposes, and to debar the use of rimming steel. He hoped that these requirements would prove as useful as had the original introduction of similar precautions for rivet steel.

Loss of the City of Khartoum.

THE inquest on the victims of the wreck of the air liner "City of Khartoum" was resumed on Monday, March 9th. The evidence of Major Cooper, Chief Inspector of Accidents for the Air Ministry, was taken. Major Cooper had been instructed by the Secretary of State for Air to investigate the accident, but he said that it was impossible to provide the court with a full technical report, because, with the exception of the engines, the wreckage had not yet been recovered. Subject to amendment later the conclusions he had arrived at in his investigations were that all three engines had failed owing to the fuel supply being exhausted. In support of that conclusion he referred to the adjustment of the carburettors which was carried out about December 24th, just before the "City of Khartoum's" last voyage to Alexandria and back. The alteration of the jet setting would have the effect of increasing the petrol consumption by at least 10 per cent. Major Cooper summed up his tentative conclusions as follows:—(1) The aircraft was unable to maintain her flight and complete her journey on account of

shortage of fuel; (2) the alteration to the setting of the carburettor was unnecessary and should not have been made; (3) a somewhat obscure fault in one or both the fuel gauges was a contributing cause of the accident; (4) the situation created by a sudden and complete loss of power and altitude was an extremely difficult one for the pilot to contend with, and strongly militated against the success of a forced landing.

Singapore Naval Base.

THE completion of the main contract of the Singapore naval base has been officially announced. It has involved the conversion of a large area of swamps and rubber land into a graving dock and into suitable land for the construction of the necessary buildings. A railway has also been constructed. The cost of the work is given as £4,000,000. According to an explanatory statement accompanying the Navy Estimates for 1935, the completion date for the main contract was originally September 28th, 1935, while the graving dock was to be ready for use in September, 1937. The final completion of the base was to be reached towards the end of the financial year 1939. It will be recalled that the estimated cost of the naval and air base at Singapore was given as £11,000,000 in 1923. The naval works were estimated at £7,700,000 when completed, and the contract was placed by the Admiralty in 1928. The Straits Settlements Government contributed to the costs of the undertaking and presented a site of 3000 acres. The central graving dock, which is 130ft. wide and 1000ft. long, was completed last year. Leading to it a quay 2200ft. long has now been built. The base is regarded as part of the Imperial defence system for the Pacific, as it will enable the Fleet to operate east of Suez without being required to make the long journey to Malta when in need of repairs or overhaul.

A New Zeppelin.

THE new German Zeppelin "Hindenburg" made her first trial flight on Wednesday, March 4th, over Lake Constance and the neighbouring region. She was brought out of her shed shortly after 3 p.m. by a landing crew of 200 men. A light east wind was blowing at the time. On clearing the shed the water ballast was run out and the vessel quickly rose to 800ft., where her engines were started. Dr. Eckner acted as pilot, while Captain Lehmann, former pilot of the "Graf Zeppelin" and future pilot of the new airship, was on board. After a flight of just over three hours she landed. During the flight numerous tests of her steering and elevating gear were made and the new "braking" system was tried. The results were sufficiently satisfactory to allow the official Air Ministry trials to take place on the following day, Thursday, March 5th. On the second flight she took off in the morning and after further control tests, lasting an hour or two, a trip was made over Munich and back, and later over Augsburg. Further tests then took place over the lake. The airship then landed after having been in the air for 7½ hours. The tests were all satisfactory. It is announced that a joint flight by the new airship and the "Graf Zeppelin" will take place, probably at the end of the present month. Flights scheduled to take place shortly are a short trial flight for testing the airship during the next fortnight; the dual long-distance flight lasting two days some time between March 20th and 30th; March 30th or April 1st, maiden Transatlantic flight to South America, which will be the first flight with paying passengers; April 15th, second flight to South America; and May 6th, first flight to the United States.

Naval Conference.

ON Thursday of last week, March 5th, a meeting of the Second Technical Sub-committee of the Naval Conference took place. The report of the Drafting Sub-committee was received and adopted, subject to minor modifications, as part of the report which will be made later by the Second Sub-committee to the First Committee. The Second Technical Sub-committee was set up on January 31st to consider qualitative limitations, but its meetings have been suspended since February 10th pending discussions between delegates on the limits to be adopted for capital ships. The report of the Drafting Sub-committee embodies the qualitative limits to be adopted for aircraft carriers, cruisers, and submarines. Discussion took place on the subject of the Franco-American compromise as to the limits to be adopted for capital ships, whereby guns are to be reduced to 14in., while the limit of displacement is to remain at 35,000 tons on the understanding that the subject will be re-examined in the next four years. The "gap" of no construction was also discussed. It is proposed to prohibit the construction of any vessel of tonnage between the high limit fixed for cruisers and some substantially higher figure, such as 20,000 tons, which would thus become the low limit for capital ships. Without some such provision the qualitative limits already agreed upon for cruisers would be ineffective, since in the absence of quantitative limits there would be nothing to prevent any Power building cruisers of tonnage exceeding the agreed limits by the simple expedient of calling them capital ships.