National Smoke Abatement Society

ANNUAL CONFERENCE AT LEEDS

THE ninth Annual Conference of the National Smoke Abatement Society was held in the Philosophical Hall, Leeds, on October 1-2. The morning session on October 1 began with the annual meeting of the Society, during which Dr. H. A. Des Vœux delivered his presidential address, which was entitled "Idealism".

After reference to the high ideals of cleanliness, both personal and civic, possessed by the ancients, and to the lack of hygiene in the Middle Ages, Dr. Des Vœux passed on to consider present-day standards. He asked whether we can pretend to-day to have recovered the ancient Greek ideal of clean and open cities. We still tolerate slums in our midst; we are yet content to live in cities periodically blotted out by fog and permanently wasted by sulphur-bearing fumes. Were every citizen an idealist, the City Fathers would have the authority and could exercise the power to clean the atmosphere.

Prof. R. W. Whytlaw-Gray (University of Leeds) presided over the discussion on town planning and smoke abatement which followed, and referred to results of recent research on the nature of atmospheric pollution. All smokes are in the process of natural coagulation, and the form of the deposit from polluted air depends on the degree of coagulation. Measurement of the size-range distribution of the particles probably affords the best means of assessing the injurious nature of polluted air, and it seems that fine particles, for example, of radius less than 0.5μ , are mainly responsible for the harmful effects. Such particles ($0.3-0.1\mu$) often form 50 per cent by weight of the solid matter in Leeds air.

Papers on town planning and smoke abatement were then read by Mr. J. E. Acfield (city engineer and surveyor, Leeds) and Mr. C. Gandy, of Manchester (chairman of the Executive Committee of the Society). Mr. Acfield discussed the doubts which exist regarding the possibility of creating smokeless zones under existing planning powers. The sections of the Act relating to 'zoning' appear to mean that enforcement of restrictions on present users regarding the fuel to be used would involve payment of compensation, and asked what possibility there is of action being taken under these conditions. Speaking of the present position in Leeds, he said that in the case of 27 buildings of any magnitude erected in the central area since April 1, 1930, the type of fuel used for central heating is in 18 cases coke, 3 coal, 5 oil and 1 gas; and in all cases where the fuel for cooking is known it is gas, electricity or steam. If the Corporation had possessed powers to require the change, subject to compensation, it would probably have achieved little more and might have been at considerable cost to do so. In a light industrial zone adjoining a large rehousing area, however, the Corporation has insisted on smokeless methods of generating power. There are now 4,200 municipal houses equipped with coke-burning ranges, yet despite an adequate supply the quantity of coke used by the tenants is deplorably small (85 tons for the 12 months ending in June 1937).

Mr. Gandy said that the time has come to consider the smoke problem as an integral part of the task of the town planner. Present restrictions on smoke emission are practically confined to factory smoke; attention should now be directed to the control of non-industrial smoke. He put forward a strong plea that legislation should be established empowering local authorities to make by-laws or schemes under which the emission of smoke would be declared a statutory offence in certain areas selected for that purpose. He gave reasons why the central areas in many cities would probably prove most suitable for selection in the first instance.

The two papers provoked a lively discussion, in which the need for appointing specially qualified whole-time smoke inspectors was emphasized. Duties in this respect usually fall to the already overworked sanitary inspector. Whilst an educational campaign for the general public is obviously required, it is imperative that the local administrators should be the first to be made 'smoke conscious'.

In the afternoon session, devoted to the discussion of the reports from the regional committees of the Society, opinions were divided regarding the necessity for further legislation to advance the cause of smoke abatement, but it was suggested more than once that the fullest use is not being made of existing powers.

On October 2, Mr. Arnold Marsh, general secretary of the Society, presented a report on behalf of the Executive Committee on "Education and Smoke Abatement". Prof. J. W. Cobb (University of Leeds) who presided, referred to the prime necessity of arousing the public conscience to the harm done by smoke. For this it is necessary to look to education all the time, to education of different grades, all seeking the same end: the efficient utilization of fuel for the generation of heat, light and power with the minimum of atmospheric pollution.

Mr. Marsh stressed that information on the value of a pure atmosphere should be given in schools. It need not form an additional subject, but appropriate aspects of it should be incorporated into the normal course of such subjects as hygiene, domestic economy and general or elementary science. He outlined the contents of booklets which might be distributed to teachers to provide the necessary information.

In the ensuing discussion, Dr. F. A. Mason, representing the Board of Education, said that the children must be made conscious that the veil of fog and murk which prevents their enjoying the welcome warmth and health-giving rays of the sun is not an act of Nature but of man's own handiwork. The Board of Education is quite prepared to favour the introduction of some instruction on the smoke evil.

The views of a science school-teacher were expressed by Mr. Pixton who said that smoke abatement is an excellent subject for the school curriculum and offers scope for interesting and informative experiments. He urged that in pressing for the introduction of the subject into school courses, the co-operation of the teachers' unions should be secured.

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