

WELFARE OF THE BRITISH FACTORY WORKER

AN important adjournment debate on accidents at work, opened in the House of Commons by Mr. Elwyn Jones on December 21, directed attention to a disturbing position which, it was urged, is not fully reflected in the reports of the Chief Inspector of Factories.

Although the last report showed that in 1960 there were 190,000 accidents causing death or disability from work for more than three days, an increase of 9 per cent in 1959, and of these 675 were fatal, compared with 600 in 1959. This included a 15 per cent increase in reported accidents to young persons and of 17 per cent in accidents to boys (to totals of 12,500 and nearly 10,000, respectively). Dr. Barnett Stross, pointing out that the Chief Inspector himself had admitted the need for more reliable information about accidents which are not reported, said that the spells of certified incapacity arising from accidents shown by the Minister of Pensions and National Insurance were much greater than the number of accidents reported to the factory inspectors. Dr. Stross arrived at a total of 235,000 accidents for a number of groups and suggested that the true total for 1960 was probably at least 250,000, the worst offenders being in the 83 per cent of factories employing only 1-25 people.

Welcoming the announcement that the Inspectorate was to be increased by some 30 inspectors, Dr. Stross suggested that an increase of about 350 was needed and that more research was required into the prevention of accidents and more co-ordination and co-operation between the Government departments involved. Mr. Jones had already emphasized that accidents were caused and did not just happen, and Dr. Stross, fully supporting this view, argued that it would be well worth while to incur expenditure of a further few hundred thousand pounds to avoid the loss of up to £300 million a year through accidents apart from the aspects of human suffering. Mr. R. E. Prentice also supported Dr. Stross in his plea for a further increase in the factory inspectorate and urged also a more vigorous policy of education, among trade unions as well as employers, fuller use of public relations, and like Mr. Jones, referred to the opportunities offered by a proper apprenticeship system.

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Labour, Mr. Alan Green, welcomed the debate, and

in replying for the Government agreed that 1960 had been a thoroughly bad year from the point of view of accidents and that everything possible should be done to see that industry was made safer for those working in it. While he was alive to the vital importance of enforcing the requirements of the Factories Act, he did not consider that an increase in the size of the inspectorate would itself provide a cure. The latest increase would bring its strength to 393 in the general inspectorate and to 87 in the specialist branch, and there were limits to the speed and to the size by which an inspectorate of this kind could be increased if its essential characteristics were to be maintained. He did not believe, moreover, that compulsory safety committees were the answer; more good would be done if they were voluntary, and the attention of several important industries was already being directed to the seriousness of the accident problem and the proved value of accident prevention machinery. The Government believed that accident prevention was best approached in industry by industry and that self-help was the most effective method of combating accidents.

Mr. Green pointed out that 65 per cent of all accidents still arose from straightforward carelessness and clumsiness. In 1961, 2,274 safety committees were operating and 4,000 factories had safety officers. The Minister of Labour had recently made two important codes of regulations which for the first time covered the construction industries as a whole, and further codes were being prepared. Earlier this year the Minister of Education had again brought the matter to the attention of local education authorities, particularly in connexion with safety training in schools and technical colleges, and Mr. Green emphasized that employers should recognize their responsibility for giving induction training to young entrants. He concluded by quoting the view of the Industrial Safety Sub-Committee of the National Joint Advisory Council that to secure a further substantial reduction in the incidence of accidents, more extensive, better organized and better informed action by everyone in industry was required, and to this planners, designers, managers, technicians, research workers, supervisors and workers had an important contribution to make.

THE SHIRLEY INSTITUTE

THE annual general meeting of the Cotton Silk and Man-made Fibres Research Association was held on October 12. The chairman, Sir Cuthbert Clegg, and the director of research, Dr. D. W. Hill, addressed the meeting. On October 12 and 13 the laboratories and workrooms of the Association, the Shirley Institute, Didsbury, Manchester, were open for inspection by representatives of member firms of the Association. More than 1,100 visitors attended on the two days.

About forty special exhibits had been arranged covering most aspects of the Institute's present research programme, which includes both fundamental scientific and technological work. Space permits

mention of only a few of the more recent developments at the Institute. In the Spinning Workrooms, for example, the prototype scutcher controller and the sandwich blender were on view. The former allows for completely automatic control of lap weight, certainly within the usual eight-ounce tolerance and generally within a four-ounce tolerance range, and it can be fitted as a conversion unit to existing scutchers. The latter is again an automatic machine, this time for recovering the lost blending resulting from the omission of stack blending in modern opening lines. High production cards are now being produced, and an assessment of such machines must be made. In the meantime, prelimin-