

## PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS

Mr. BOWMAN : I now call upon our President, Mr. Lawther, to deliver his address.

Mr. W. LAWThER (President) : My first duty this morning is to draw your attention to those who have passed away since our last Conference. A. B. Clarke (Scotland); Robert Smillie (Scotland); George Lansbury, and others. There can be no doubt that so long as there are mines and miners the name of Bob Smillie will be remembered for the part he played. I am sure there is not a single miner anywhere but desires that at least whatever he does he should endeavour to follow the example Smillie gave. Scotland also suffered a very severe loss by the death of Andrew Clarke, who was known to all the older delegates. He was one of those quiet, forceful protagonists who brought his point of view to this Conference and about whom we had never any doubt. We hope that others will be able to fulfil what he set out to do. Then there was W. H. Holden, who was not perhaps so well known to the delegates. Messrs. Powell and Benetta from South Wales, who played their part.

We have month by month, losses by unfortunate disasters which have taken place in various parts of the coalfield. Since our last Conference members of our organisation have gone down in the struggle. We have members of ours in the Army, Navy and Air Force playing their part. We want to refer to others whom we have in mind, friends who belonged to the Miners' International, martyred Polish, Dutch, Belgian, Norwegian, Luxembourgers, and now the French Miners. We have not been able to receive a single line as to their whereabouts since disaster overwhelmed them a few weeks ago. We realise that many of them inside the Miners' International, inside our own Movement, will have to face the firing squad, and thus like the Czech miners, will have played their part. I ask you to rise as a token of our sympathy for those who have passed away, and those of our friends who have died or are imprisoned in concentration camps.

*The delegates stood in silence as a measure of sympathy with those who have passed away and those who may be in concentration camps.*

Contrary to custom, I do not propose here and now to deal with the problems that affect our industry. These problems, some of which are of the most vital importance, are incorporated in the Executive Committee's Report (copies of which have been circulated to the delegates), and will receive the careful attention they merit at the appropriate time. I shall content myself with mentioning that among the far reaching subjects to be discussed are:—

- (1) Wage settlement on cost of living increases.
- (2) Problems of coal production.
- (3) Various Safety Measures.

We have a Miner Minister of Mines who will speak on these measures.

(4) Workmen's Compensation.

As a Member of the Royal Commission on Workmen's Compensation, I, along with my colleagues on that Commission, have been profoundly disappointed. We are dissatisfied because we were unable to get the employers to even attempt on account of the exigencies of the war, to give their evidence before the Commission so that we could have arrived at some findings in order to make recommendations for improvements to meet the terrible circumstances in which many of our members labour day by day. That has been reported to the General Council of the T.U.C., and is to be met by the fact that there is to be brought in an Emergency Measure dealing with increased payments.

(5) Unemployment payments and regulations.

So far as this is concerned, we are bound to say that at last the Minister of Labour—Mr. Bevin— has made some changes in relation to the payment that will go a long way towards the goal we had in front of us.

(6) Arbitration proposals for settlement of disputes.

It may be that an opportunity will be taken to discuss and extend arbitration proposals for the settlement of disputes; as everyone is aware the Government, through the Minister of Labour, is to introduce regulations in order that whatever may be the nature of the dispute between the workmen and the employers, it ought to be settled by arbitration rather than by a strike or lock out. I am sure that I am voicing the opinions of the mass of miners in relation to that decision, as witness the evidence of decisions that have been taken in the districts that we agree with this proposal. Rather is it my intention to deal with the more pressing events of to-day which must be regarded as of paramount importance in relation to our future. We, as miners, have something to say and for what we say we accept full responsibility and ask none to help us shoulder it. I feel that, having regard to the grimness of to-day's task, with all that is involved, there has been awakened in the mind of each member of our organisation, a keen sense of that responsibility which, both individually and collectively, will be borne with fortitude.

No period of history has witnessed so many rapid changes as this generation has been called upon to endure. Twelve months ago in Annual Conference, we were earnestly engaged in formulating proposals, recording suggestions and urging reforms with the sole object of improving the industry and the well-being of those whom it employed. And now, in comparatively so short a time, we are confronted with a problem of veritable life or death; for, make no mistake, such is the issue before us in which there is no room for doubt. Either we conquer the forces of Fascism, which are the very negation of all we believe in, or, we sink to the levels of abject slavery.

Two years ago, at our Annual Conference at Whitley Bay, the fraternal delegate of the Russian miners, in the person of Alexis Nikolenko, President of the Donbas Miners of the U.S.S.R., speaking in the name of 800,000 organised Russian miners, said: "Fascism attempts to destroy all democratic liberties and to establish a regime of mediæval barbarity and oppression of the toiling masses . . . Before the eyes of the whole world the Fascists are destroying with impunity the peaceful peoples, are inhumanly annihilating hundreds of thousands of defenceless children, women and the aged, are razing to the ground peaceful cities and villages and are destroying priceless values of world culture.

"The working class of whatever country, including the miners of Great Britain, must grasp the simple truth that they have no guarantee that to-morrow swarms of Fascist chasers and bombers will not bomb workers' quarters."

That is what Fascism has meant to others; that is what now confronts us.

The day of the wishful thinker in world affairs is gone by, and, by strength and courage alone will our fate and destiny be decided. Perhaps too long have we merely wished it could be otherwise, for it must surely be forced upon us now that the gangsters in charge of the Nazi machine of destruction and carnage, are in no measure to be deterred by such an attitude. And to those who even yet are prepared to argue round the question, I submit the following testing queries:

Do you desire the continuance of the right of Conference, or organisation and of Trade Unionism?

Do you desire the destruction of your heritage and of all that the pioneers of our Movement handed down?

If you are at all concerned about the rights of mankind and the maintenance thereof, you *must* act. There is now no middle course, for upon action and not mere words depends the issue. I have no time to dwell upon the many unanimous resolutions which we passed in the days of safety and peace. Time and time again we urged that a stand be taken against Fascist aggression. Never were there more insistent, consistent, and persistent protagonists in the call for resistance to the menace than the British miners; no one more than the British miners repeatedly pointed out the foolhardiness of continued appeasement. Did we not unhesitatingly condemn the actions of the Munich muddlers, who, by some strange fancy, imagined they could secure peace and understanding with Hitler and Mussolini? From whose ranks but ours did the warnings go forth that according to information received from the Czech miners, Hitler was about to seize that unhappy country? In face of criticism then, we condemned what we believed to be a cardinal error and the intervening period has but served to strengthen our belief. In plain words we expressed our disgust and deprecated the

collaboration of certain of our countrymen with Ribbentrop and his like. And to us what was a crime in London does not become a virtue when it is performed in Moscow. Our words carried no double meaning and though, with each succeeding week, the canvas of international politics was continually being retouched, our indictment still stood in bold relief.

More than ever are we convinced that in the best national interests our counterparts of the Laval and Petains should be known not as Fifth Columnists but, as Clem Attlee suggested in a recent broadcast, as traitors. Apply this name, too, to those whisperers whose devilish insinuations are directed against the self-sacrificing efforts of men trying to save our Movement. When everything that made Britain a force in democratic leadership is at stake, when the life of Britain is in peril, the Government of Britain must exercise the same measures against its "Quislings" as it employs against its enemies abroad. And in this respect let us quickly cast aside degrees of wealth or station, for it is criminal to suggest for one moment that such ill-timed vapourings, from whatever influential source, should be considered when, although conflicting with tradition and custom, the workers through their Trade Union Movement have steadfastly applied themselves to each and every task required of them.

Have we not dealt with such people in our own ranks? Unhesitatingly we tackled the disrupting influences of those who blindly accepted political doctrines prepared for them and, by so doing we incurred the hatred that only revolutionary Pilates reserve for those with whom they disagree. But in doing this we felt that we were right. For to accept the leadership of men whose duty it is to toady to political circuses, will for ever destroy our position and will set us well on the road to adopting the Nazi outlook.

When my brother, who died fighting Fascism in Spain, wrote me his last letter he urged that whatever the cost, whoever fell by the wayside, the menace that was destroying the workers must be fought relentlessly. I accepted that call. And, just as the miners took the lead in the splendid response to the cry of stricken Spain so must we now stand in the forefront of our own country's defences. We are glad that at last it is recognised that, miners by their understanding of fighting day by day with explosives, will now, that they are on the job, show that they can do it.

Last year a brave and courageous soul from Poland, Herr Stanczyk, who I am glad to say is still alive and in this country, spoke at our Annual Conference at Swansea. He told us what Fascism meant and we now know, only too well, that the truth of his words finds evidence in his country's terrible experience and in the losses sustained by his organisation's membership. In the following words he warned us:

"I know that this Congress is mainly concerned with economic and organisational questions, and not with politics. But it is my earnest belief that in times such as we are living in now it is our duty to raise our voices against the crime of Fascism.

"The success of every item on our programme, the improvement of social conditions; safety for the workers; the reduction of hours; old age pensions; everything depends upon whether or not we can do away with Fascism.

"If Fascism defeats us, our fate will be the fate of the German, Austrian, and Czecho-Slovakian workers—prisons and concentration camps. That is why I believe that the struggle against Fascism should be put foremost in all our activities. The German and Czecho-Slovakian miners and other workers have been terrorised into leaving our community. I am sure that they will come back into our midst eventually. I am sure of it because I know that we will continue in our fight to the very end until all prisons and concentration camps, where people are now suffering because they dared to love freedom, because they desired to liberate the world from the cruel oppression of millions of workers by a handful of Capitalists, will have disappeared."

In the light of recent events in France think of these words, then mark well the continued utterance of Stanczyk:

"We are proud and happy to see the spirit of solidarity which is so manifest among you. Bitter experience has taught us a lesson. If Fascism gained the victory in several countries it was because the working-class of those countries had, temporarily, forgotten or ignored the fact that our only defence, our strength, our salvation, lies in Unity and Organisation."

Did you not cheer him, and cry "Go on. We are with you to a man in this fight"! I refuse to believe that even one delegate present that day considered those words a mere empty declaration, for miners have never pledged themselves lightly but always with the knowledge that, whatever the price, their pledge must be fully redeemed.

And the spirits of the great men who occupied this office before me urge you on. Bob Smillie, Tom Richards, Peter Lee, Herbert Smith—all men of imperishable memory, sincerity of purpose and honour beyond doubt—call upon you to keep your word. For in the knowledge that they would have died happily rather than break such a vow, you must stiffen yourselves to the resolution that their trust shall never be betrayed.

Consider for a moment how, during the last three years, our Miners' International Federation has practically been destroyed. German, Spanish, Czech, Dutch, Belgian, Luxembourg and French miners, all are now suffering under the yoke of Nazi tyranny, and the immensity

of this fact, which no one can dispute, is sufficient example of the gravity of the situation which now confronts us.

It is given to us, therefore, as a privilege and an honour seldom offered to a nation in the history of mankind, to uphold the banner of human liberty and freedom. The freedom handed down to us by our forbears who risked their all to establish Trade Unionism is in our keeping. The right to foregather this morning in conference to discuss questions affecting your individual and collective life is nowhere enjoyed so freely as in this country. Here, where matters affecting your industry are to be debated, each chosen and elected representative may put forward his point of view. Such freedom I value and its preservation is worthy of our deepest respect and furthest effort.

We can, as is now being proved, make a vast contribution to the well-being of society generally and in the difficult times ahead ; we are ready, when the opportunity presents itself, to play our part. The industry itself must prepare to meet tribulation in the future, but we are confident that with one of our own members as Minister for Mines, the difficulties will be faced cheerfully and resolutely. Dai Grenfell provides us, for the first time, with a Minister who has been a miner, who knows your life from the inside, and who needs no instruction as to what mining conditions are. During the ten weeks he has been in office he has tackled his job with the characteristic thoroughness of a pitman, and like his colleagues Attlee, Greenwood, Bevin, Dalton, Morrison and others is effectively and efficiently carrying out his duties.

In the most difficult times possible these men have been called upon to fill responsible and important positions and they enjoy the confidence of every miner since we know that the prestige of our Movement is in capable hands and that it will emerge from these dark times with added lustre. But, just as at our last Conference we were unable to foresee the circumstances under which we would meet on this occasion, so now are we unable to forecast the role of next year's meeting. We can, however, make plain to others that in this supreme hour of trial we are determined to carry on Freedom's battle and, to many, such a message may be one of confidence and hope.

With the problems that at any moment may arise, your patience will be tested, but with the courage and fortitude that has sustained you through countless disasters, the faith in the ultimate triumph of right and the determination to win through, so evident in your work in the pits, men may yet know hope and be encouraged to resist the Nazi oppressor.

You are represented in every phase of war work possible. By your Red Cross efforts, your Ambulances and the lending of money free of interest to the nation, you have given a lead to others more favourably placed. And by so doing you were proved to have the courage of your

convictions, for in no more concrete form could you have backed up your warnings so earnestly.

In my last year's Presidential Address, I said:

"From the inception of Fascism and terror in Italy to the enthronement of Hitler and murder in Germany the Labour Movement has made its protest and urged that a stand should be taken. We know what that means; we realise the terrible consequences, but just as it has been necessary in the evolution of our own Movement, in the struggle for recognition and to obtain an improvement in the lot of our people, drastic action and great sacrifices have had to be made, so will we as part of this nation that loveth liberty and cherishes freedom and has placed the right of free speech and assembly as a jewel without price, accept our share in that stand against aggression."

Nothing has occurred since which prompts me to alter by one dot or comma that statement.

Let that clarion call again go forth from this Conference as being indicative of our determination to go ahead and to win through. Let it say for us that in this struggle there can be no compromise with assassins of liberty, but that we are resolved to see the struggle through to the end. Let it tell our comrades, the United Mineworkers of America, how we stand, so that they may know our outlook and our views on matters so vitally affecting us and our continental colleagues. May it breathe some measure of hope to those in concentration camps with all their attendant horrors, so that yet once more they will square their shoulders and grimly resolve to see still another Miners' International Conference. And to Russian miners may it come as a reminder of other pledges borne out by the words of their President who said:

"The workers of the Soviet Union connect all their triumphs during the years of civil war, the years of reconstructing the despoiled social economy and in the construction of socialism with the assistance rendered by the international proletariat."

And may it cause them to think and ponder for a while.

Fellow delegates, we are in the fight and we are for it. Let us never rest, therefore, until the security of mankind has been established. The word "defeat" must be expunged from our language and only the word "victory" known.

Victory is our aim and we must do our all to achieve it.