

PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS.

MR. BOWMAN (Vice-President).—It is now my pleasure to call upon the President to deliver his address.

MR. W. LAWTHER (President).—I understand that it has been circulated to the delegates.

For the second year in succession the fact that our Annual Conference is being for three days only instead of the customary week, is a reminder, if such were needed, of the circumstances under which we live. As in previous years my first duty is to refer to those who were with us and of us but have since passed away. Twelve months ago there was no more cheery optimistic soul in our midst than the President of the Northumberland Miners' Association, Alderman William Golightly. He left the Annual Conference looking forward to attending, on our behalf and on behalf of the Trades Union Congress, the Canadian Trades and Labour Conference. Alas, he was the victim, with others, in the sinking of the *City of Benares*, one of the many brutal murders perpetrated by the Nazis.

William Golightly will long be remembered for the part he played in his native County of Northumberland, where he occupied positions of trust and confidence in both the Trade Union and civil life of the community. Those who knew him, loved him for his honesty of purpose, steadfast convictions and sincerity of ideals that inspired him in his daily life.

It is our sad duty to refer to the death of 923 British Miners in 1940. Special reference to this serious increase is made in your Executive Committee's Report that you will discuss later this week, and to which we will refer in a moment. To-day we have to record a new and sad reminder of the War in the serious loss that has occurred amongst our members and their families due to enemy action. Their numbers cannot be given at this stage, but together with the rest of the civil population they have been and will remain in the front line of the battle for Freedom's cause.

To those of our members in the Armed Forces and their sons who have gone down, to the Miners in every land who have died and suffered in this conflict, to them all, known and unknown, we pay our tribute and respect.

I ask the delegates to stand in silence as a mark of respect.

The Delegates stood in silence as token of sympathy with those who have passed away during the intervening period of Conferences.

SAFETY IN MINES.

Your attention has been called to the rise in the accident rate in the Executive Committee's Report. The facts are before you and speak for themselves. It is your duty to those you represent to face up to whatever measures are necessary to have this rate reduced. It can be

done even to-day if we apply the Laws that are on the Statute Book. Nothing should be allowed to prevent the steps being taken to have immediate and conclusive action taken. Whilst it is impossible, during the struggle the Nation to-day is involved in, to have the full recommendations of the Royal Commission on Safety in Mines carried through, certain essential steps have been adopted towards a greater and more adequate number of inspections carried out by men at the pits.

It is now up to our own folk to have every pit examined methodically and thoroughly in such a way that this high accident rate will be reduced.

It must be regarded as the duty of every member of the Federation who occupies any position of responsibility to thoroughly and carefully examine the causes leading to this high accident rate, and if it lies within our power to reduce this rate then it must be done. There must be no "perhaps" or "mays" about this fact. No slogans or passing of resolutions will bring this desired and essential change about.

It is imperative that a keener and wider interest be taken in Pit Safety Committees, Safety Devices and Safety Measures; for the responsibility of the Pit Safety Committee is such that it should receive the whole-hearted support of every miner working in the industry.

With the object of increasing the margin of safety in the pit, especially on mechanised faces, your Executive Committee has, during the last few months, made an exhaustive examination of the Voortmann Safety Stemming Plug in the coalfields of Northumberland, Yorkshire, Lanarkshire and South Wales. It is claimed that the use of this plug increases the safety margin and safeguards the health of the men where high explosives are used. Your Executive Committee is satisfied that this plug fulfils the claim made by the makers, and the Federation is hoping that its adoption will be approved by the Mines Department and its use become general in the coalfield.

On these and other remedies there can be no two opinions, and to the extent and degree that they are accepted and acted upon we will see a diminution in the figures in the accident rate.

To those who have been killed and injured this is a duty. To neglect it is a crime.

COAL TRADE POLICY.

Perhaps it would be true to say that at no period in our industrial history has the subject of coal as an essential factor in the life of the Nation and for the successful prosecution of the war been so prominently in the public eye as it is to-day.

Last year at our Conference we were faced with the fact that our export trade had vanished. To-day the Nation, despite practically no export trade, is requiring coal to a degree and extent unparalleled in the history of the Federation. Much has been written and much has been said in

condemnation of the steps taken within recent months to face up to the problems of to-day. It is essential that the facts should be known in order that the solution should be found. It will not help in any way to give lip service to high-faluting platitudes that have no relation to either the facts or the problem.

From this controversy arises the simple elementary truth that coal is of national importance, essential to the winning of the war. Unlike the present means of offensive action against the enemy the coal industry is subject to the caprices and desires of individual forces and ownership. For that the Miner is not responsible. That is the responsibility of the Nation as a whole.

We could very easily retort to those who now feel anxious concerning the future of the coal industry, as well they may be, that oft in the piping days of peace we urged them to think of coal and its use to the Nation as being so vital and important as the Sun is to Mother Earth. The national outlook, however, was not in that direction. It was in keeping with the typical halcyon days of that pre-war era of not doing to-day what can be done next year or the year after.

We have stated time and time again that we will in this hour of crisis, when the destiny of civilisation and all freedom loving Nations is at stake, do all we can to give the Nation the necessary coal supplies. We have given up holidays ; we have set up Pit Production Committees ; tackled absenteeism and have not sought a single advantage, but we often have grave doubts that a Nation which for the pleasure of sport can allow petrol to be used which our comrades of the deep, the Merchant Service, risk and give their lives to bring to our shores, really appreciates what the Miners also risk in their daily toil to give the Nation coal.

We have not hesitated to say to those of our men who ignore the issues at stake to-day, to tell them in the most emphatic, definite terms, that we shall not tolerate or allow strikes in war-time. It is criminal and treason to our sons and brothers in the Armed Forces and our comrades of the Miners' International who lie in concentration camps or prison cells or are working and fighting like the Russian Miners to defend their Socialist Fatherland, to take such action.

ESSENTIAL WORK ORDER.

New legislation in the form of the Essential Work Order has been applied to the industry. A wages increase has been secured in the form of an Attendance Bonus. Both have been subject to criticism. During the week we shall defend these important measures if the occasion arises to do so.

We cannot understand that type of individual who is always clamouring for State action on any and every problem, who loves to strut across the stage of public life arrayed in civic dignity, yet opposes steps such as the Essential Work Order.

What does the Essential Work Order do for our industry ? It gives,

in the words of the Order, status to the coal mining industry as an undertaking of vital importance to the Nation for two objects. Firstly, that it is expedient for securing the defence of the realm and the efficient prosecution of the war. Secondly, for maintaining supplies and services essential to defend the realm and win the war. Thirdly, it provides for a guaranteed wage for days upon which the Miner is unemployed under circumstances over which he has no control. Fourthly, provision is made for welfare of the Miners, including food canteens. Fifthly, the setting up of Pit Production Committees to deal with all problems affecting increased coal production.

Is there an individual amongst us who, witnessing the horrors and outrages of the Fascist and Nazi gangsters, disagrees with these clearly defined objects, namely, defend the realm, win the war and maintain the supplies and services to attain this goal?

That is the issue. There can be no evading of our individual and collective responsibility when at this very moment the World is witnessing the biggest and bloodiest battle ever fought in the long annals of human sacrifice and daring.

Is there an individual amongst us who will deny that the Essential Work Order has brought, for the first time in our history, a guaranteed wage when no work is available. Who will deny that through the Pit and District Committees we can have a say in the running of the industry, and we have secured this by negotiation without recourse to strikes.

Only those who desire to utter shibboleths and slogans will refuse to participate in the initial stage of workers' control. It can be made the Miners' Charter.

It makes one shudder to consider what would be the fate of this island if ever that negative type of mind as typified by some opponents of this Order were to be given power. Remember this further fact that those of us who are industrial leaders were handed this legislation by Parliament to administer. In the world of administration things have to be done, not talked of, and we are satisfied that the Order has been appreciated by the thousands of Miners who have been laid idle and who have been able to secure a guaranteed wage in the place of unemployment benefit.

The Attendance Bonus was an increase in wages, additional to any increase due under our cost of living wages agreement. So far it has meant thousands of pounds to our members, and we are satisfied that, as your Executive Committee will report, the doubts and misgivings of yesterday have been dispelled. Part of the opposition to the Attendance Bonus came from those who love opposition for its own sake.

TO-DAY'S TASK.

We have spoken of the immediate problems that confront us in our industry, problems that cannot wait but have to be decided day by day.

We trust, therefore, that you will keep in mind when you are debating these problems the fact that day by day the struggle this nation entered upon nearly two years ago is still being waged with such ferocity and intensity by armies so large in numbers and mechanical forces so powerful that mankind staggers at the picture portrayed. Yet it is this clash of force and power that reveals to man how his destiny is being determined.

It is not an issue of nations involved in some concession for territory or for imperial ends. As Stalin said to the Russian nation and the World on July 3rd :—" It is the united front of the peoples who stand for freedom and against the threat of enslavement by Hitler Fascist Armies."

It is necessary that you who are here present as delegates who have in days past supported resolutions on the threat of Fascist and Nazi danger based on your knowledge and understanding of those forces, should not slacken for one single moment to follow the lead of the Prime Minister, Mr. Winston Churchill, who made what Stalin described as an " historic utterance " on behalf of the British Government in which members of the Labour Party are playing their part.

This lead promised full support for Russia in her stand against the Nazi and Fascist aggression which you and I have urged should be made. You, this week, will be called upon to give decisions that the Miners of every country in the world will anxiously await. From prison cells, from concentration camps, from the hellish compounds erected by these foul fiends of mankind, the Nazi gangsters, your fellow Miners want to know what you are going to do.

I leave no delegate in doubt as to my personal attitude. I have made this clear in speeches, pamphlets and broadcasts and in my Presidential Address of 1939 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."

Who now denies that statement of fact ? We are now joined in that struggle by the Soviet Republic of Russia. They, too, have come into the number of nations and peoples whom Hitler wishes to enslave.

They, too, are fighting with us against the Fascist and Nazi menace. Already areas of that land of Socialism have come under the heel of

the most ruthless of destroyers of human liberty history has ever recorded. It may be that great dangers and sacrifices will have to be faced and made to wipe those dark forces from the face of the earth. You have no choice ; it is either defeat or victory. Forces so brutal, so callous, so evil, must be destroyed. This is not the time nor the place to talk of what we will do somewhere, sometime, when Hitler and Mussolini are no more.

We of the British Labour Movement, representing the Miners of Britain, can accept as one of our guiding principles, as free men and women, that attitude to those who want to know what should be done, the statements made by Stalin in the speech to which I have already referred, namely :—

“ Our enemy is cool and merciless. He intends to seize our land ; bathe in our sweat ; to seize our wheat and our oil ; the fruits of our labour. . . . ”

“ We must at once re-organise our work on a war footing subordinating everything to the interests of the front and to the task of crushing the enemy. *All those who by their panicky state of mind and their cowardice, hinder the task of defence must be immediately brought to trial regardless of who they are.*”

That will be endorsed by all who have any regard for Truth, Liberty and Freedom.

To-day we, the vanguard of the industrial workers of Britain, say to the workers of Russia in general and to the Russian Miners in particular, together we fight ; together we will win and finish for ever this foul lying murderous system that a Nation has adopted as its religion, whose people have almost lost hope and can only be delivered from their degradation by those Nations of free men and women suffering, toiling and fighting for Freedom.

Life, Liberty and Happiness amongst the Nations of the Earth can only come to those who love Life, know Liberty and enjoy Happiness, and to us hath this trinity of human endeavour and human achievement been made manifest.

We shall pursue to the ends of the Earth the evil forces of Fascism and Nazism that have destroyed and seek to destroy that which is good and true in humanity's onward development to a fuller life.

Now is the moment for those of our fellow Miners in Europe who are under the heel of the Fascist and Nazi tyrants to use any and every means to help destroy this evil system. The British Miners say to you in the most emphatic and unqualified language, that as we have taken upon ourselves, together with our fellows, the duty of upholding the banner of Freedom and carrying the torch of Liberty in spite of great sacrifice, so must you *now*, above ground and below ground, do your utmost to assist in this struggle for Freedom and Liberty.

To you we pay our tribute. To you we offer our support, and we

look forward to the day when once again the Miners' International can meet as free men in a World free from Nazi oppression, brutality and slavery.

To that day then with one voice and one accord we shall not cease to work and strive, and we shall do it because it is our right and our duty.