

PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS

MR. J. BOWMAN (Vice-President) : I am going to call upon the President, Mr. Lawther, to deliver his annual address.

MR. W. LAWTHER (President) :

FELLOW-DELEGATES :

To-day we meet as an Annual Conference under more favourable circumstances, in relation to this Nation, than any of the last decade. While the battles of the United Nations still rage, with an intensity never before known in human history, against the forces of barbarism and evil, there is much more than hope to inspire us ; there is the clear dawn of the free life we need ; the free world that free men and women everywhere will inherit lies just ahead. The price that is being paid is the heaviest civilisation has ever been called upon to bear. Not a town, village or hamlet but bears the marks that the beast of Fascism has left upon it. From all ranks, from all classes, from all services of the air, sea and land, its victims have come. In this industry likewise the toll has been heavy.

During the year that has passed many are missing from our ranks whom we could ill afford to lose ; some of whom played an important part in the history of this organisation. Among others was Duncan Graham, M.P. for Hamilton, one of the stalwarts of the Scottish Miners and one of the most sincere and conscientious of Miners' M.P.s. Another was John Spencer, of Derbyshire, who used to take part in every Conference. He was a quiet, solid and dependable upholder of all that is best in the Trade Union world. To them all, known and unknown, we pay our homage and tribute for the cause they served and the services they have rendered.

There are many subjects that one could speak of this morning, but I shall confine myself to some of the questions that will come before Conference for discussion and will indicate what I believe are the most salient features of those matters.

ONE MINeworkERS' UNION

One of the most important of your deliberations will be on the proposals of the Executive Committee. They will place before you plans and an outline of what they believe should be the form of organisation for all mineworkers engaged in and about the industry in Great Britain. Final decision will be deferred until it has been submitted to the membership for their views and consideration. It has passed from the stage of academic theory to the realm of practical application. In the long list of Conferences that this Federation has had this subject on no single occasion has ever been defeated. The principle has always been accepted. It is to-day the logical development of the economic changes and structural alterations that have taken place in the industry itself. The last occasion upon which this matter was before the organised industrial and political wings of our Movement was when the future of the industry was being considered. It was held that it would be necessary in any transition towards public ownership, which is our aim, that it would be incumbent upon the Miners in this industry to play a new part through their organisations. No one will deny that certain steps have been taken towards that object. This vital change would,

it was contended, mean an entirely new outlook on the part of the miners' organisation and it was held that :—

“ Obvious steps in that direction must be the proper unification of the Trade Union policy and of Trade Union organisation which must conform to that of the industry.”

That was in 1936. Time has not altered the truth of that decision. Its necessity is now even clearer and more emphasised. There is hardly a phase of any problem to-day affecting the well-being of every man and boy in this, Britain's premier industry, which is not now the subject of national endeavour, negotiations and decisions. The events of the last two years bear out this statement. Of course the change to one mineworkers' organisation will mean changes in every respect. That always occurs when steps forward are taken, but it is the business of men who look forward to go forward. Going backward is what happens to dead men and organisations.

THE BEVERIDGE REPORT

During the week a discussion will also take place on this Report, which has been the subject of much controversy in the last few months. With its essential features and outlook there can be no disagreement on our part. It would be the most gross betrayal of the sacrifices the common folk have made, are making, and will have to make, if when peace dawns there is no definite plan to have that freedom, for which millions have died, translated into terms of security from the haunting, soul-destroying poverty following from unemployment that rested over large areas of this land in the dark and dismal twenties and thirties of this century. That state of affairs unfortunately was the reward of countless thousands of Britain's wealth-builders. We alone as a nation, for the first time in our history, had Acts of Parliament passed designating certain districts as “ distressed areas.” The Beveridge Report makes provision for preventing a repetition of that period of national degradation and it is the duty of all who desire a better Britain to support this change. The views of Labour on this report are now known and neither vested interests nor jugglers of finance shall be allowed to block the pathway to security. The common folk need less blue prints of what the future should be, but more definite Acts on the Statute Book that will indicate to them in their hour of need, whatever be the cause it arises from, where to go and what to do in order to live in a degree of security. Labour does not accept without question all the proposals put forward in this Report. Some of them, we think, must be improved and we are prepared to continue to urge those Departments of State responsible to take the bigger view that the Labour Movement envisages. One word of warning we must utter, and that is that there must be no parley with, and no concession to, those who plainly do not want to do anything, or at least as little as possible, and who use the shallow pretence of “ the cost,” “ the servile state,” or “ regimentation ” as an excuse to evade their social responsibilities. The nation's most valuable asset is a healthy, virile and happy people and no tinkling cymbals of copper, silver or gold can outweigh.

WORKMEN'S COMPENSATION

It is not without bitterness that I consider that while in death and suffering the miners pay a price greater than that in any other industry ; while the lists of

those crippled and injured grow, the cry of the dependants for simple justice is ignored and the soulless grabbing parsimony of the Mutuals continues as it did in the days of peace. My long experience of their contemptible indifference persuaded me many years ago that by their callousness they stood clearly self-condemned enemies of the miner.

In this terrible struggle the workers might have been helped by the feeling that after facing the risks inseparable from our great industry they would, if crippled, have been considered worth at least the few miserable pence per ton necessary to provide them with the necessities and even, perhaps, some of the decencies of life. The sums necessary are well within the reserves available for use by the Mutuals. Even the Accident Insurance Companies have said that the case for increasing the amount of compensation is formidable if not unanswerable.

If youth shows a disinclination to take up work in the pits one of the clearest reasons is that if they become injured the Mutuals will do their very best to make the position of the lads as insecure as possible.

It costs, as I remarked in my observations last year, but a few pence per ton to provide the necessary funds. Since the last Conference was held the Workmen's Compensation Act, 1943, and the Pneumoconiosis Schemes issued thereunder have come into effect. The Federation is not satisfied with the progress which has been made, although it recognises that in some of the hardest cases these measures have had an ameliorative effect.

Much remains to be done and the Federation will continue to press for legislation.

In the field of workmen's compensation one cannot help feeling that out of the substantial reserves at their disposal and having regard to the small contribution necessary, arrangements could have been made by the employers and their representatives to remove this blot from the mining industry, but apparently the few pence are needed for the purpose of building up further reserves. Early legislation is expected. It is long overdue. The Pneumoconiosis Schemes came into operation on July 1st and consequently it is too early to give an account as to how they will work in practice. It is hoped that they will go a long way to provide for all cases in which men become incapacitated in consequence of this terrible lung disease, and that some contribution will be made by way of benefit to those (and the total dependants of those) who have been affected since October 22nd, 1934. The Federation pressed and will continue to press for better provision.

Apart from the provisions relating to Pneumoconiosis the Act of 1943 deals, in section 6, with the calculation of the weekly rates in cases of total and partial disablement and, in most areas, has had the effect in total disablement cases of increasing the weekly rate to the maximum in a large number of cases. The Act has also been beneficial in some of the cases of partial disablement, but on the question of the amount of the weekly rate and the proper method of its calculation there is still a division of opinion between those who are pressing for the worker to be given a fair deal and those who at all costs will do everything in their power to frustrate and penalise him.

The Federation has made up its mind that it will not relax in its efforts ; that it will with continued vigilance and determination and with every ounce of its

strength and power, press its demands for the justice which has so long been denied.

On this note I end my observations on this important subject. To appeal to the miner to give of his best, and then to deny him the justice which in his hour of need he is entitled to expect, is to make a mockery of the appeal. In its effects this denial of justice sabotages and undermines the mighty industrial effort which we are all making. This short-sighted money-grabbing penny-foolish niggardliness weakens our efforts. We will not rest until we have succeeded in putting beyond the reach of private individuals the power to add this insult to the burden which is being carried by our injured comrades.

FUTURE OF OUR INDUSTRY

In the past twelve months the machinery set up in the White Paper which Parliament adopted has been in operation. Some of the changes forecast there have been of immense benefit. Let me refer to the new medical and rehabilitation services. Whilst they are not in full and complete operation we do owe a debt of gratitude to the Minister and his Parliamentary Secretary, Mr. Tom Smith, for the way in which they have striven to get this industry, the most dangerous of all, the best equipment that medical skill and science can devise. They can rest assured that all we can do to help them will be done. It is only in keeping with the trend of events, that mansions that were built in many instances from the proceeds of the industry should now be used to restore and rehabilitate injured and sick miners.

There have been many debates in the House of Commons, in the Press and wherever men congregate, on coal. It is essential that this matter, which will be the subject of discussion here this week arising both from the Executive Committee's Report and the resolutions upon the subject, should have your attention for a few moments. No one can accuse the miners of ever having neglected to point out to this nation the peril that existed in either the halcyon days of peace or in the stress of war that coal was of the utmost vital national importance. Year after year those engaged in the industry have urged again and again that it ill-fared a nation that neglected an industry upon which so much and so many depended. Our experience and intimate knowledge of the working out of the present-day scheme of control has strengthened rather than weakened that point of view. One of the greatest weaknesses of the control now in operation is demonstrated by the fact that you cannot have successful production whilst ownership remains in private hands and outside the *national* ownership. It is against the nation's best interest to attempt to sidetrack this obvious fact by raising the old boggy that this would lead to controversy. Where are the changes that have taken place in any phase of our national life since September, 1939, that have not upset ancient and hoary shibboleths? The grim task of defeating the Nazi menace has made it incumbent upon Parliament to pull down historical and traditional customs even when by so doing they have interfered with human life and human destinies. We have never refused to point out to our members in this time of national crisis what was their common duty. We have taken steps to prevent stoppages, we have censured those who have been responsible for such. Appeal after appeal has been made to set everything to one side to give the nation the coal it required. It is equally our duty to point out the next step that must be taken to inspire confidence on the part of those engaged in the industry and to break the fetters that hamper production. This, we contend,

cannot be achieved with the present system of dual control. The machinery to administer this industry cannot work with alternating controls ; there must be direct national ownership and control without outside interference. It is the convinced opinion of all who put national interest before personal prejudices that this objective must carry with it the full acceptance of individual responsibility (however humble a post the individual may occupy) as the paramount duty to the nation. Equally so is it in the national well-being that there must be the utmost use made of coal. It ought to be regarded as a criminal offence to waste in any form a commodity that is produced at such risk and peril to life and limb. Outside the Armed Forces there is no body of men which pays such a price by loss of life than the men in this industry. Miners everywhere are emphatic that, whatever Parliament does, there is one thing that it must not do, and that is there must be no lifting of present control and going back to the haphazard, unscientific chaos with its consequent misery of the past.

The guaranteed wage must remain, the national weekly minimum must remain, and the Boys' Charter must become operative. The problem of recruitment cannot again lapse to the boys being driven into the pits by economic factors.

RESEARCH IN MINING

The miners welcome the claims that are being put forward by scientists and research workers to develop the use of coal on a scale never before contemplated. We appreciate the steps already taken in research and investigation, and we are glad to co-operate in achievements to put Britain's coal trade in the forefront of all industrial enterprise. There have been, naturally, tremendous difficulties to overcome, but we give those research workers this assurance, that any help the miners can give will be given by both advocacy and practical methods to accomplish the desired object. The miners have everything to gain by utilising the efforts and methods of scientific investigation and every step that has been or will be taken will have our unstinted support. Just as the period of the war has proven that there is no such word as impossible, except for those who wish to avoid inconvenience, so we hold that there can be no limit or finishing post placed against those men and women who at this moment are striving and urging to give this nation a new conception of the utilisation of coal.

TO-DAY'S TASK

With the urgent need of the nation for coal the miner has never doubted or hesitated to do all that lay in his power. We will examine every proposal that is placed before us that has for its immediate object the improvement of the industry to increase still further the coal needed for the effort of the United Nations. This we regard as our duty, but we must remind certain individuals that this will not be helped by those outside the industry indulging in a campaign of abuse of a body of men who risk daily and hourly terrifying dangers. To us it seems, to put it quite bluntly and frankly, dishonest on the part of those who have for years neglected the needs of the industry to place the responsibility for to-day's situation on the miner. Our folk have practically none of the facilities that ordinary factory workers enjoy to meet their physical and social needs. In bygone years it was the miner who had to force public attention upon this industry, its inequalities and multiple variations both geological and geographical. The differences between district and district and mine and mine have resulted

in the general confusion that bewilders the outsider in relation to this industry. A pit can never be compared to a factory. Nature itself placed limits on this. Yet the vast majority of miners have not shirked their responsibility. Moreover, as our turbulent history has proved, we have never hesitated to deal with shirkers in our own ranks, often in ways that outsiders have not appreciated. The life and work of a miner gives him an outlook that is only understood by those in close contact with him. Yet it was from our ranks, in those far off days of the Fascist attack on Spain, that appeals were made to those in authority to make a stand against the aggressor. Often we thought we were talking to the deaf and maybe blind. Miners, unlike many of their critics, never gave praise to Mussolini, Hitler or Franco and from that position we will not retreat. It is for those deep-seated, human reasons and faith in Freedom's cause that we link our demands to to-day's needs. We hate Fascism and Nazism with the same intensity that we love Liberty and cherish Freedom. It was this Trade Union that on May 1st, 1942, convened a Conference of Miners from every nation, allied or enemy, to weld a force that would give the greatest amount of support for our faith and cause. That day there were gathered miners from Great Britain, Czecho-Slovakia, Poland, Belgium, Luxembourg, Austria and Germany to show their deep detestation of the Nazi methods. Messages of support came from the U.S.S.R., U.S.A., and the Swedish Miners, and of their unity of purpose with us. The French miners sent a message through an underground source with other French workers, as some of their leaders had collaborated with Vichy and gone Nazi. Since then we have heard of the French miners, and they wait the freeing of their nation from Nazi domination. It was a German miner who spoke at that Conference saying to the miners of the Ruhr: "I want to tell you to trust these British comrades and comrades in other countries now because they are fighting against the same common enemy. I call upon you to resist and to profit by every raid of the R.A.F. in order to reduce production in the mines and in the workshops. I ask you to smash Hitler's war machine." The work of that Conference has been carried through, enlarged and developed with the help of the International Transport Workers and the International Metal Workers. Broadcasts are put across every week-end of what we are thinking and doing in to-day's struggle. The truth is put across to Hitler's victims frankly and fearlessly so that they know that the free workers of the United Nations will keep up the supplies of guns, planes and tanks to blast the guilty criminals off the face of the earth. There is no misunderstanding as to what those crimes are. Apparently there are some people in the Labour Movement who want us to forget the horrors practised by the Nazis at Lidice, at Rotterdam and wherever they have set their feet. Let me quote from a recent issue of *Pravda* published by the Press Department of the Soviet Embassy in London in the *Soviet War News* of Saturday, June 26th, 1943:—

"At Sapogov the Germans carried out a programme of deliberate murder which took three or four days to complete. They killed about 1,000 patients who were undergoing treatment in the hospital at the time. Kargan, chief of the German field police in Kupyansk, and his deputy Schweifel tortured and killed 248 Soviet people, some of whom were buried alive. These two-legged monsters will answer for their crimes. They will only be saved from just retribution if they find a dog's death before their trial.

"But they are not the only ones who will answer. They committed their horrible atrocities because the German Government and the German

Army Command demanded it of them. These degenerates were reared by the Nazi Party. These cannibals carried out Hitler's will. Mackensen was fulfilling the orders of the super-thief Alfred Rosenberg. This representative of Hitler will answer for the systematic destruction of the monuments of Russian culture.

"Now, when Hitler's strategical plans have fallen through, when Nazi propaganda has started wailing about the danger which threatens Hitlerite Germany, the invaders try to appear to the world as 'defenders of the European fortress.' They shout hysterically about European culture, European thought. They even complain about the inhumanity of bombing German and Italian towns.

"The word 'inhumanity' sounds like vile blasphemy on the lips of these monsters. Throughout the cultured world, the sick are treated with solicitude. It is the elementary basis of humane behaviour. Even in remote barbarian times sick people were not killed. In the most backward parts of the world, sick people are still considered human beings. Only Hitlerite Germany has violated this law. It has reared cadres of hangmen with doctors' diplomas, doctors who poison people. It has reared sadists who find it amusing to murder a child.

"The German gangsters flinch at no cruelty, no baseness. They are capable of anything. Only one thing can restrain them—fear. They are cruel like beasts, and cowardly like beasts. They indulge in their perversities because they have gone unpunished. They have not been called to account for their crimes. They came to our country like conquerors, fully convinced that they would never have to face any tribunal. But the Germans are not conquerors, and never will be conquerors.

"They will be tried, and they will answer for every peaceful Soviet citizen they have done to death. They will answer in full. We will not leave a single tear unavenged. We will not leave a single drop of blood unpaid for.

"However the German beasts may try to hide, they will not escape the great national wrath of our country. Their crimes have been documentarily established. The account will be clear. Words will be few. Death to the German criminals."

Let all those who want to forget these crimes hide their heads in shame. If they have any weeping to do let it not be over the fate that awaits these criminals but for their unfortunate victims. Let them reserve their sense of fair play for the Europe that has been destroyed and the democratic institutions that have been wrecked by Hitler's new order.

We, as miners, will not shirk from playing our part with our Russian Allies in the task they have undertaken. They who shirk their duty in this moment of history can never make history. It would be treachery to the workers' cause to ignore this appeal that our Russian comrades put forward. If I know anything of the rest of the miners in the International Movement they will not spare Quislings in their own ranks and certainly not those who have lined up with Nazi fiends.

The events of the last two weeks in Russia and in Sicily are the grim realities of what lies ahead. More than ever have we to realise the part that coal will

play both in our war industries here and for export to the nations which our armed forces will be liberating from the forces of evil. Miners are the Commandos of the Home Front and they will acquit themselves, as they know their Commando comrades-in-arms are doing, but we also ask that this nation must realise, too, that it has a duty in seeing that the essential conditions are here to keep the picks swinging to cut that coal.

Let it be our everlasting pride that British Miners made possible the blows that will wipe Fascism off the face of the earth. This black creed of Fascism, befouling all that it touches, extinguishing all light, alien to everything clean, decent and humane—this is the enemy to whose defeat we must subordinate everything.

Once we have given it the knock-out blow we miners will lead the way along the path of social advance and progress. Then, as now, we will fight to strengthen the cause of Labour, to unite the Labour Movement at home and abroad, and to speed the coming of Socialism—that day when we can use all the resources of modern civilisation only to establish the security, the happiness and the full glory of the common people.