

PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS

THE VICE-PRESIDENT (Mr. J. Bowman) : Now, Gentlemen, we come to a part of our programme which is always eagerly anticipated by the delegates, the Presidential address. I will now ask Mr. Lawther to deliver his Presidential address.

THE CHAIRMAN :

FELLOW MEMBERS :

Events have moved with great rapidity since the last Conference of our Union. Two things stand out. First, the General Election, which was in progress while we were deliberating in Conference at Blackpool, resulting in a resounding victory for Labour and second, the end of the war with Japan which came with dramatic suddenness in August, shortly after two atomic bombs were dropped on Japan. This act in itself brought into clear relief, at the end of the second World War, the challenge to the peoples of the world of the dangers inherent in modern scientific development if it is not harnessed for the good of humanity. A third event of considerable importance was the foundation of the World Federation of Trade Unions. This is the most important step for Trade Unionists in this past twelve months. What has long been a dream, a hope, an aspiration, is to-day a reality. It is the only solid achievement of the desire of the world's workers to realise that sometime, somewhere, they must begin to build out of the material they have at hand what they feel is needed to meet to-day's requirements. It marks a departure on the part of the industrial workers to build an organisation free from the wrangling that so often besets the pathway to unity amongst the workers. The first move came from the British Trades Union Congress, and except for those perennial diehard isolationists of the New World, the American Federation of Labour, the ranks are closed. Perhaps the trend of recent economic events in the U.S.A. may shape the destiny of the workers of the U.S.A. along lines which will bring them closer to the World Federation of Trade Unions.

Whatever may be the outcome of immediate discussions of the world's diplomats, there is one thought, one desire uppermost in the minds of the world's workers, and that is that Fascism must never be allowed to rear its ugly head, and war between those who suffered the terrors from Hitler, Mussolini and the other bootjack, Franco, shall not happen again. The workers who, by their sacrifices of blood and treasure, have made it possible for Freedom to live again must not allow the next generation to be sacrificed. In this organisation alone exists the means to prevent another holocaust. We can and will use our strength to prevent what is now talked of so glibly in some quarters as the third World War.

You will be proud of the fact that the miners have decided to set up inside the World Federation of Trade Unions a Mining Department in accordance with the Constitution, and within a few weeks we shall see a conference of miners from every part of the globe welded together as one united force to work for the improvement of the conditions of those upon whom the world depends. One new factor will now have to be faced by the I.L.O., that the bulk of the miners will be working under conditions in

which their industry is nationally owned, and will mark a new departure in industrial relations.

At the last Annual Conference you, as the representatives of three quarters of a million miners, their wives and families, pledged yourselves to do all that ordinary mortals could do to help to change the politics of Britain. It was done to a degree and extent without parallel in our island history. It was the challenge of those who had suffered untold misery, exploitation and distress in Britain's premier industry for a fuller and better life. No section of the community realised more clearly the issues involved than those you have the honour to represent. It was in 1874 that the first two miners, Thomas Burt and Alexander MacDonald, were sent to the House of Commons. In the years that have passed, at every election, others have followed the pathway of those pioneers of miners' representation determined to secure fundamental changes by legislation for the improvement of the miners' lot. To-day's generation is to reap where others sowed, and within a few months the word "coal-owner" will pass out of our language. We enter the new era in which both the minerals we win from Mother Earth and the mines become the property of the nation. Nationalisation of the mines is the realisation of our hopes and aspirations.

The return of a Labour Government altered the whole course of development in these islands. For those of us who are engaged in the great coal-mining industry the establishment of a Labour Government meant that nationalisation of the coal mines would become a fact, and thus bring to fruition all that we had fought and strived for since the early days of the foundation of the old Miners' Federation which, a year and a half ago, became the National Union of Mineworkers.

DIFFICULT COAL SITUATION

The decision, however, to nationalise the coal industry is only part of the great coal problem. When the new Minister of Fuel and Power, Mr. Emanuel Shinwell, took over from his predecessor, he found that a situation had developed in the coal industry which threatened to endanger the first steps the Government were about to take to re-convert industry from war to peace-time uses. You will all be aware of the approach that was made to the National Union of Mineworkers—all of which is recorded in the Annual Report before you—and the unique step that was taken by the National Union of Mineworkers to do all in its power to increase coal output during the period from September, 1945, to April, 1946. The National Union of Mineworkers appointed for six months a National Production Officer and Production Officers in the districts (of whom the salaries of eight were paid for out of the funds of the National Union), to assist in the process of removing obstacles to increased production, and to aid the Government in the solution of one of its most difficult problems. We were the first Trade Union to seek to increase our production by engaging in a campaign financed with our own money. (*Hear, hear.*)

The target of an additional eight million tons over the programme set by the previous Minister of Fuel and Power, which the Labour Minister considered was necessary, was not achieved, but by our efforts it was possible

to obtain two million tons more, and this enabled the Government to get through the winter without any serious dislocation in transport, or disorganisation in industry, and the public services generally. The part which was played by the National Union of Mineworkers because of the bold, imaginative step it took to meet the crisis, is not generally recognised. At a time when the men in the industry were exhausted after five years of war, with food inadequate, with equipment that is often poor in quality and great shortages of the essential spare parts, the mineworkers, during the six months since the campaign started, were able to provide the country with two million tons above the estimate which had been prepared by the Minister of Fuel and Power before the Labour Government took over.

As we record in the Annual Report, output per manshift rose steadily. This is the answer to all those critics of the miners and those who are continually attacking the Labour Government, for embarking upon its nationalisation programme. The Labour Government, resting upon the loyalty and class conscious awareness of the mineworkers in this country have saved this industry from catastrophe. This is something which must never be forgotten.

CAMPAIGN TO INCREASE OUTPUT ACHIEVED SOLID RESULTS

This campaign, a campaign which achieved such solid results, was made possible of achievement because we have one union for mineworkers. We are beginning to build up an organisation that is able to respond to the needs of the men at the pits. This development must be continued, for, with the coming into existence of a nationalised coal industry, new tasks will be imposed upon our organisation.

We are under no misapprehension of the simple fact that this new occasion that we have made imposes new duties, too. We have never been under any illusions that in our entrance into the new era of public ownership of Britain's mines, new problems would have to be faced. Miners have never shirked either duties or responsibilities that their calling has demanded. The terrible death and accident rate of the industry is proof of that truth. If miners had had any fear in their make-up, those casualty lists, often described in most graphic terms, would have bred what modern medical science designates as a psychosis that would have resulted in a Britain without miners. Yet we have some misguided folk who are continually ranting about the duty of a miner, who have never, by voice or pen, uttered a protest against the foul, brutal, inhuman conditions that miners have ever endured from those who owned them. How often those pioneers for better conditions for their fellows were laughed at when they urged changes for human betterment.

The National Union of Mineworkers will never hesitate to urge upon its members what is their duty in the sphere of production of an essential commodity; nor will we withhold criticism of those who will not understand that to obtain that production you must have the conditions essential to production. It is so easy a line for those fireside armchair critics to take

who blame the miner for an industry that has in the past paid more regard to profits than human well-being. Neither we, nor those we represent, pay any heed whatever to their parrot cries.

At last it is recognised by all those who have any regard for the truth that the present impasse that the nation faces in relation to coal is due to national neglect of coal. Generation after generation of miners have urged, again and again, the British public to face their responsibility to those who gave them the commodity that has provided the foundation of Britain's industrial greatness. The people gave their representatives a mandate to take the first steps towards the realisation of that elementary truth. We place on record our thanks to the Labour Government for the way in which they have carried through the measure of nationalisation, and we assure them that they shall, as in the past, have no more sincere supporters in whatever may be the next steps they take towards a Socialist Britain. We hail the fact that the march towards the end of exploitation of man by man is to be intensified. There can be and there must be no slackening towards that goal.

NATIONALISATION OF THE INDUSTRY

I now turn to the Coal Industry Nationalisation Bill which, in general, conforms to the principles outlined in the plan of the Joint Committee composed of representatives of the T.U.C., the Labour Party and the National Union of Mineworkers established on the initiative of the National Union of Mineworkers.

As those present know, when the industry is nationalised and the Board takes over, it will not merely deal with the function of coal getting, but will also operate the ancillary undertakings such as by-product plants. It is right and proper that this should be so. We feel that the Labour Government, taking the broad future development of the industry into account, and the need for creating a firm industry based upon the principle of producing and utilising coal in various ways, has acted wisely. We in the Miners' Union have long recognised the importance of treating as a single unit coal getting and the various ancillary undertakings that are, or should be, associated with a well-organised coal industry.

The Bill has been improved in many respects as a result of representations made by our own organisation and the Trades Union Congress. For example, there was no definite provision in the Bill for the establishment of consultative machinery for those engaged in the industry. Again, we felt that there should be some provision in the Bill to provide compensation for those who may become redundant as a result of schemes of re-organisation that will have to be pressed forward if the industry is to become really efficient. A clause has been put in which will enable the Union to ensure that members who are rendered redundant shall be compensated for any loss sustained. Another question that was not adequately covered in the Bill was compensation for damage to working-class houses as a result of subsidence. During the Committee Stage, as a result of pressure from the miners' M.P.'s, the Minister was able to give an assurance that while the full burden of compensation for

subsidence could not be carried by the National Coal Board, steps will be taken to investigate the problem with a view to advising the Government as to what measures should be taken by the State to meet this problem.

I think we may say, therefore, that the Coal Industry Nationalisation Bill, when it completes its tortuous passage through both Houses of Parliament, will emerge as an Act which for the first time will make it possible to so reorganise, rebuild and re-equip the coal industry that it can not only provide decent wages and conditions for those employed therein, but conditions will be created which will make it possible to supply the people of this country with adequate supplies of coal at an economic and reasonable price.

On the question of the amount of compensation that is to be paid for the assets to be taken over, it is not possible to speak with any degree of certainty. There is, as the Minister pointed out in a recent debate in Parliament, a substantial body of opinion in this country which is opposed to compensation, and takes the view that the mine owners, who have recklessly squandered a valuable asset, are not entitled to any compensation at all. The view of the Labour Movement, however, is that compensation should be paid, and the formula laid down by the Trades Union Congress was in general agreed to by the Government in laying down the principles for determining the amount of compensation to be paid. As you know, the actual amount to be paid for the coal industry assets is to be determined by a Tribunal, and we must await the results of their findings before we can judge whether this is the right and proper method for determining compensation. For my part, I would have preferred the Government itself to have fixed the amount of compensation in accordance with the principles that have been accepted by the Movement as a whole.

As you know, a comprehensive measure of social well-being is now well on the way to being placed on the Statute Book. We are very glad that the Minister in charge, Jim Griffiths, who is one of our own members, has not forgotten the terrible incidence of industrial disease operating in the British coalfields. He has recognised that the miners are entitled to a supplementary compensation payment in addition to that laid down by the Bill. We hope that one of the first functions of the Coal Board will be to work out a satisfactory scheme similar to that put forward by your National Committee in the Annual Report.

GOVERNMENT FACES DIFFICULT PROBLEM

We have just entered a new coal year which, as you know, runs from May of this year to April, 1947. How deep is the crisis in the coal industry, and how immense the tasks for the Government and the country in making the industry one which can fulfil the needs of the country, is shown by an examination of the facts. Most people in this country knew, in a general way, how deep was the crisis in the coal industry after years of mismanagement by private enterprise. There is no doubt that it was this realisation by the people of Britain of the complete failure of private enterprise in the basic industries which was largely responsible for the return of a Labour Government. I am sure, however, that few people really grasp the depth

of the crisis in the coal industry, and fully understand the terrible legacy which the Government inherited from the past. (*Hear, hear.*) This country was saved from catastrophe last winter by the efforts of our mining folk, whose deep sense of loyalty to a government of their own choosing overcame many obstacles.

The real roots of the problem have yet to be solved, and the next year will be the greatest test for our Government and for all those associated with coal mining. Let me quote a few facts. The coal year 1946-47 started with coal stocks amounting to 9.2 million tons as against 15.3 million tons in March, 1945 and 17.9 million tons in March, 1944. Again, it must be noted that consumption for industrial and other purposes is on the increase. I estimate that the home needs during the next year will amount to approximately 194 million tons, but it must be recognised that production in the year 1945 only totalled 174 million tons, and present coal stocks are not available to meet any serious deficit that might arise. In these few simple figures are contained the essence of the problem. In this situation, therefore, there are elements of industrial catastrophe unless the proper measures are taken to meet the situation.

The inescapable fact is that the coal which our country needs cannot be won unless more men are recruited into the coal mines in this country. In the first quarter of this year only 2,962 juveniles (that is, those under 18 years of age) entered the mines. The number who left the industry in the same period, as a result of deaths, accidents, old age and so on, totalled 16,670. The net natural wastage was, therefore, 13,708. Of course, because of abnormal circumstances, the return of 11,144 from the Forces and the recruitment of 5,872 men from other industries, mainly ex-miners, a decline in the total labour force was prevented. But shortly the industry will have to rely on juvenile recruitment. The return of men from the Forces and of ex-miners from other industries will soon come to an end as a source of manpower. The industry will then be up against the hard facts of the situation.

THE MINERS' CHARTER

All those who are listening to me will be aware of the deepening manpower crisis in the coal industry which is one of the basic factors in this great coal problem. Our Union has given a great deal of thought to this question, and the publication of the Miners' Charter was our contribution towards a solution of this difficult situation. You all know the main points in the Charter and will fully understand that normal recruitment cannot be secured in the coal-mining industry until the conditions in the industry are radically changed. We do not expect that all the points in the Charter can be introduced immediately, but we do say that the proposals outlined in that Charter must be introduced in accordance with a progressive plan. Certain measures will have to be taken immediately, and we have made our mind and thought on this question perfectly clear to the Government.

From our knowledge and experience of this industry, based upon first-hand contacts of a lifetime spent in it, we knew that with the creation of a publicly-owned industry there must be reforms that would give youth

an urge and an incentive to play their part in it. The old method of recruitment by poverty and its terrorism cannot operate in a modern world. To any who doubt that that was the method, I invite them to read the autobiographies of men from our own ranks who have described their boyhood days in language that I cannot hope to equal. I think of men like Bob Smillie, and, in our own day, the present Secretary of State for War, Jack Lawson. We realised that it was no use holding up our hands and bemoaning those bad old days. They have to be changed, and we know what changes are necessary now, and it is our duty to seek them now.

As we said in presenting the Charter to Mr. Shinwell :

“ It is realised that whilst the manpower requirements of the industry will tend to fall as the industry is modernised, during the immediately ensuing years it will be necessary to depend upon the technical equipment now in existence. The only permanent source from which new manpower can be drawn and adequately trained is youths under 18 years of age. In the past the maintenance of the industry's manpower by the continuous supply of youths to compensate for wastage has come mainly from the ranks of mineworkers' sons. The mining community, however, is not willing to accept a special responsibility for the supply of new mining labour. Quite rightly, miners and their wives have come to regard their sons as citizens entitled to seek a livelihood in more congenial, less dangerous and better-paid employment in the same way as do the sons of other people. Young persons will only be attracted to the coal-mining industry in sufficient numbers when it offers to them conditions of employment which compare favourably with those offered in other industries, and a higher standard of living than has been the lot of those who have toiled in the industry in the past.”

We believe our men are entitled to a fortnight's holiday with pay, and we are also convinced that an early introduction of the five-day week is an essential condition in these days for bringing men into this great industry. The mineworkers of this country have a great part to play in the creation of a healthy and prosperous coal industry. I said so last year and I repeat again, nationalisation was an essential condition for the release of that energy and initiative which belongs to our people in the mines. I may be permitted to quote what I said on that occasion :

“ If our great industry is to be revolutionised and re-born, it will impose tremendous responsibilities on each and all of us. It is our effort, our co-operation, that must win nationalisation and overcome the difficulties of putting it into effect. The problems that result from hundreds of years of mismanagement will not melt like magic at the word 'nationalisation'. But once the word is spoken, once the legislation is passed, then we shall have the chance to tackle the job we have longed for—to give this nation a mining industry of which it can be proud, an industry producing plentiful supplies of coal at reasonable prices and under conditions that provide a healthy and happy life for those who have to work in it worthy of their arduous calling.”

This possibility is now open to us. Nationalisation of the coal mines is here. While we recognise that nationalisation is not Socialism, it is, never-

theless, a very big step to that end. If we construct in association with the National Coal Board, consultative machinery which will enable our men in the industry to really play a part in developing and reconstructing the industry, we shall then be able to play our full part in overcoming the great difficulties which confront the nationalised undertaking.

The National Coal Board has been given assurances by your National Executive Committee of your whole-hearted co-operation. We believe that the outlook of the Board, comprised as it is on the Labour side of our Secretary, Ebby Edwards, and the General Secretary of the Trades Union Congress, Lord Citrine, both of whom have our confidence and trust in their task, will give those human problems affecting the well-being of the men and boys of this industry, their immediate attention. That, we are confident, will be their greatest asset.

Along with the rest of our colleagues in the Trade Union Movement we express our thanks for the burial of the Trades Dispute Act. The last twelve months will leave a glorious record in British political history for future generations to emulate.

We are witnessing the end of an epoch. None will mourn its passing, and we rejoice at the birth of a new Britain that all who have regard for human decency will welcome. There is no birth without struggle and pain, and we know that we are witnessing the beginning of the deliverance of the common people from the age-long servitude that was their lot. The remaining barriers that prevent the enjoyment of life, of liberty and human happiness for the mass of the people must be swept away. To that end the Labour Government must work and strive in the interests of the working people who placed them at the helm to rid the country of unemployment, poverty and want. And in that resolve and high endeavour they will have our support. (*Applause.*)