

CREDENTIAL COMMITTEE :

CHAIRMAN : And for the Credential Committee :

Messrs. J. LYNCH (Derbyshire); H. MCKAY (Northumberland); D. R. LLEWELLYN (Somerset).

(Agreed).

PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS

MR. J. BOWMAN (Vice-President) : It falls to my lot once again to call upon the President, Mr. Lawther, to deliver his annual Address.

MR. W. LAWThER (President) :

FELLOW-DELEGATES :

It is with a feeling of great pride that I open this Annual Conference of the National Union of Mineworkers. This Conference will be a glorious landmark in our long and great history, for it is the first since the historic taking over of the mines by the Labour Government. In addition, we have recently achieved one of the greatest reforms on behalf of our members and their families—the Five-Day Week.

Today we meet under circumstances that differ from the past as night from day. New Year's Day, 1947, saw the inauguration of a new era. From that day the nation owned the mines; from that day coal was to be produced for the benefit of the nation. This change we welcome with an understanding of the responsibilities that we must accept with the change in ownership. No Trade Union has ever faced up to the changes as has the National Union of Mineworkers; history will bear witness as to how in every sphere we have played our part.

Abundant proof of the efforts made by our Union in increasing production is to be found in the report of your National Executive Committee covering their work during the past year. Whilst some may think we went too far and others, I have no doubt, would say we did not go far enough, the fact remains that we paid very large sums out of our own Union funds with a view to bringing about an increase in the production of coal, and our members responded to our appeals to a degree that for all time stands to their credit. The miners' efforts saved this nation, and in the crisis that developed in the early part of the year, they never shirked their duty. Attempts have been made to lay the blame on the Minister of Fuel and Power. It is sheer nonsense for outsiders to talk in that way. Did not this Union ask the nation time and time again to give us the men and the tools and the coal would be got? The guilty persons are those who, having the health and strength, shirked doing a man's job. Up to recent times the view has been held that the digging of coal was a job which belonged exclusively to those who lived in mining villages. It does not; it is the job of all who feel that coal is of vital importance. Let this nation realise once and for all that it is the duty of every able-bodied man to make up his mind to do this job, and not to talk of what the other fellow's duty is, and forget his own.

Today we need a new valuation of services and we have no hesitation in affirming that those who undertake difficult and unpleasant work should have more consideration from society than hitherto. We know that the National Coal Board looks upon its employees in an entirely different light from those

who employed miners in the past, and it is the fundamental duty of the National Union of Mineworkers to seek to improve the lot of their fellows.

It would be easy for us all to recall many dates in our past and arduous struggles, but I cannot help thinking of one—1926. Who would have thought then, when we stood alone, that within little more than twenty years the dreams of our forefathers would be realised; that the mines would have ceased to belong to the most rapacious and ruthless capitalists in the land, and were the property of the people.

We have already justified every word that was said about the positive gains that this would bring to British economy, and time will bring further proof of how right we were, and what a heavy price the nation has had to pay—and unfortunately must continue to pay for some time to come—for the delay in nationalising the mines.

But we shall not rest on our laurels, for we, perhaps more than any other section of the community, understand our responsibility to the common people, and know that the key to Britain's future success lies in our hands. At the same time, it is necessary to stress that there should be no easy illusions that it can all be left to the miners; the whole nation will have to face up to its new responsibilities to the mining industry and the mining community as a whole.

It will only be possible to do this if the whole of the people now thoroughly understand the deadly seriousness of Britain's economic position, and what is at stake. It is no less than the future independence of our country, the whole present living standards of the working-class, and the possibility of fulfilling the programme on which the Labour Government was returned to power.

All the pipe dreams about a middle road, about an electoral victory being in itself enough, are going rapidly by the board. There is a questioning abroad, a desire to know the why and wherefore of our present position, and what has to be done, to overcome all our present difficulties.

WHAT IS THE POSITION?

What are a few of the facts we have to face up to? To understand them is to find one of the keys to their solution. We must recognise once and for all that we have lost for ever our former monopoly of colonial markets; that we have become a debtor and not a creditor nation; that we face a very heavy, adverse trade balance; that our key industries—the life-blood of the nation—are technically backward and out of date, due entirely to the policy of the capitalists; that we are living on loans from Canada and America, which are rapidly running out; that we have not yet succeeded in finding those new forms of planning our economy and coming to new trade agreements with the other progressive and democratic nations of the world.

I view with supreme contempt those enemies of the Labour Movement who now try to take political advantage of Britain's economic difficulties for their own ends, and let there be no mistake what those ends are—they are afraid of the advance of the working-class all over the world. That is why we welcome the new outlook put forward by Secretary Marshall. Whilst no details are available, it does seem that there is a desire to step out on a policy for the

restoration of a war-weary world. We in Britain are not down, we are not out, we are very much alive, and our faith is stronger than ever in our Socialist principles. It is highly desirable that nothing should be left undone to help this objective. It may well be that the United States now realises that the original Truman plan of saving the world in pieces, when he adopted his proposals in relation to Greece and Turkey, is now of no avail. It may be that the United States has realised that conception of perhaps their greatest citizen who was an Englishman, namely Tom Paine, and that the world is their domain, but not for aggressive or, in modern terms, imperialist purposes, but for goodwill. We in Britain know of the phases through which we have passed and it may well be that we shall yet see those in the United States who think they mesmerise the world with the almighty dollar, face problems in their own country which will test to the full all their theories about the American way of life. We are not unmindful of how quickly the richest nation in the world ended Lease-Lend when the Labour Government was elected, as a threat to it right from the start. We notice what the American monopolists are doing to try and crush their own Trade Union Movement; we do not close our eyes to the racial hatred and discrimination in what is alleged to be God's Own Country.

We saw what penalties were inflicted on the American miners for standing up for their rights, and we do not believe that capitalists who do this to their own workers will be inclined to treat the workers of other lands in any more moderate fashion.

We are not deceived by the talk which seems to be dominating America at the moment, that all America is doing is being done to "contain Communism": Hitler talked that way. The sooner we all understand that one can never suppress dynamic ideas, even if one does possess the atomic bomb, the better for all of us.

It is true that some Americans hate our Socialist policy as much as that of the Soviet Union. It is a tragedy that there are even some folk in Britain who find more in common with this policy of what we believe millions of men died for, than they have done so far to make allies of those who were our allies in the struggle against Hitlerism.

It is too tragic to dismiss as a passing phase of political manœuvring the attempt of Mr. Churchill to set up a United Europe facade that can have no other end in view than preventing closer unity with Soviet Russia. It gives the second opportunity to those who have never forgiven the U.S.S.R. for her forward march nigh thirty years ago. It is treachery to the high ideals for which millions gave their lives. Let none under-estimate the grave consequences that this reactionary move means. You cannot support a United Nations' policy with a disunited Europe.

WHAT SHOULD BE DONE NOW?

Pious exhortations on posters saying: "We Work or We Want," will never evoke the necessary response—they only serve to remind the working-class that it has worked, when it had the chance, all its life, and wanted all its life.

We yield to none in our desire to see production reach its utmost limits, for that

is the only way to lasting success, improved conditions for the workers, and also the only way to place our country on a sound economic basis. But it is not enough. Work is the redeemer for today's salvation. It may be if the need should arise that Britain shall be driven to seek a new understanding with what used to be our Dominions and what we term the Colonial peoples, which we now dignify by the name of the British Commonwealth of Nations. What gigantic resources we can all have, if they are pooled for the common good. What great and eager allies we have in the millions of workers and peasants in the Soviet Union, and throughout Europe. We could get together? It is not beyond the wit of statesmen of all the nations involved to devise ways and means through which our foodstuffs, our raw materials, our industrial products, our great industrial and technical skill, can now all be assessed and shared on the basis of new forms of international economic agreement? Cannot we all operate new forms of Lease-Lend to win the peace, as once we did to win the war? To say "No" is to be guilty of political defeatism, and a lack of faith in our own class.

If necessity drove us to adopt the measures that we have suggested, it could not be termed that they were directed against America. For that nation needs markets and will need them more than ever before, but it must be on the basis of the commonweal for the common world, and not for the enrichment of the few. This policy we feel would find a deep response in the United States. It would encourage the labour and democratic forces today threatened with measures never before contemplated, to face up to the future. I believe it is essential that we remind the American people that when we negotiated the Loan it was at a certain level of prices. These have increased very much since that time, and it is only common justice that we demand the Loan should be drawn upon at the level of prices obtaining when Britain signed on the dotted line. We are, furthermore, justified in declaring that the convertibility of sterling into dollars is open to grave doubt at the present time. This nation will not sacrifice all it did to defeat Hitler, to sit at the foot of some new financial oligarchy.

WE STAND FOR PEACE

At this moment when everywhere there exist the terrible monuments of poverty and destruction that we have as a result of the recent conflict, it was staggering to read recently of those who contemplate the dropping of atomic bombs over Europe as if it were a natural process for mankind to operate. These sadists who talk so glibly must understand that every man and woman with a spark of human decency within them, cannot and will not tolerate this fiendish talk. I am entitled to put this question: Who is to fight this next conflict, and against whom is it to be fought? The advocates of atomic destruction make no bones about whom it is to be fought against—namely, the Soviet Union. I take this opportunity of declaring my belief that no British miner or other conscientious worker would produce any materials for such a war, and the sooner the warmongers understand that, the better. We realise that in the next war Britain may well become the advance base.

No, our path is a different one. It is the path of economic prosperity and lasting peace, of good neighbours with all who desire it, and the closest bonds of friendship with those whose Socialist ideals are our ideals.

I believe that ours is the nation which can give the lead in this matter. For if

Britain declares its firm intention to stand alongside the Soviet Union and other peace-loving nations wherever they may be, then no other nations in the world dare talk of a new war.

Britain must give the lead too in all international conferences for the adoption of policies which can reflect the common good of the peoples everywhere; an end needs to be made of the sparring for special positions. The peoples of the world cry aloud for goods and trade of all kinds; it is lunacy to believe it is beyond the wit of man to see that these needs are satisfied.

There is no necessity for this constant talk about the impossibility of a Socialist nation not being able to work in close co-operation with a capitalist nation, for in our own lifetime we have given the lie to such a conception. We worked together in the military struggle to defeat Fascism. We can continue to set the example in remaining true to Labour ideals and develop those forms of co-operation between all nations, so that the peace shall be won in our day for all time.

The Tories come out with their new Charter. Why did not they operate such a policy when for years on end they had such limitless opportunities? It is only window dressing, meant to deceive the politically ignorant, but there are not so many to be found now as there used to be. The war against Fascism brought not only suffering and sacrifice, it brought a political awakening that in my judgment has come to stay. We have seen the end of Tory domination in Britain, and we must make sure that we have also seen the end of any manœuvres to pretend that our economic difficulties are so great that they require any kind of understanding being reached with the Tories.

THE MINING SITUATION

Now let me come on to the situation in the mining industry.

If ever Britain had reason to be proud of its miners, it is now. How some of our enemies gloated over the prospect of the five-day week being accompanied by a great drop in output, and how their nefarious wishes have been confounded. But let us look facts in the face. Coal lies at the very heart of every economic problem that Europe is facing at the present time. We have it in our power to make a new contribution to the solution of our economic difficulties that can stand out in our history, just as some of the great military and naval battles which school children are taught represent our brightest ages of achievement.

We dare not be satisfied with a target of two hundred million tons, one hundred and ninety million of which must come from deep mines. We need at the very minimum two hundred and twenty million tons of coal this year, and the nation must be prepared to take the necessary measures to obtain it. We must set ourselves the aim of becoming once again a great coal-exporting nation, for only by these means can we cheapen the cost of living, ensure adequate supplies of timber for the houses the people need, redress the adverse trade balance, and, in short, put Britain on its feet.

The coal is in the bowels of the earth; it needs no ships to bring it from abroad, no dollars to get at it. What it does need is manpower, new machinery, and extensive development work in the mines. We welcome a plan that will

take into consideration every aspect of the position; one that the miners from the pits to the headquarters of our own Union have discussed and formulated in conjunction with the technicians, and the Divisional and National Coal Boards; a plan the miners know, and are convinced about; one that sets the size of manpower required and which the Government and the nation is determined to obtain; that mobilises the engineering industry to make the machinery for it, whatever private patent rights have to be set aside; one that gives the miners the best conditions in the world from the point of view of wages, compensation, consumers' goods, houses, transport, food and health and welfare conditions; and one that gives mining the dignity of a career as attractive as that offered by so many other industries and professions at the present time.

When Britain wanted Spitfires and tanks to defeat Hitler, nothing was allowed to stand in the way of getting them. The most ruthless measures were quite rightly adopted, priority was given to their production, and it did not matter whose corns were trodden on. As Britain wants coal it must be prepared to adopt similar measures.

All of us have declared that never again must we go through the experiences of last winter, and there is no need to do so. But if it is to be avoided it does not call only on the miners for extra effort—the people as a whole must respond. This is why I believe it is necessary to tell them all the facts. Five million tons of coal means employment for one and a quarter million workers. At present our steel, textiles, engineering and building industries urgently need extra supplies of coal. Our homes, offices and factories are unheated as an emergency measure to save coal.

All this is surely enough to make the nation coal conscious. Whatever is given to attract manpower to the mines will be understood; whatever is given to the miners as their just reward will be understood. The public have responded magnificently to the many trials and difficulties which the coal shortage has meant for them, and here let me pay tribute above all to the womenfolk of the nation. They have done splendidly, but it is time to take the measures that can ensure we have all we require of the coal that is in Britain's earth.

“Let's get at it, keep at it and stick to it,” should be the watchword for the nation.

Now I will say a word to my own people. There can be little doubt of the new status you have won in the nation. There can be no question of the value that a single trade union organisation in the mining industry and nationalisation of the mines have brought to you and yours, and there are greater gains still to come. But my appeal is this. Whatever other folks do, we have to set the example. We know our trade, its dangers and hardships, but we are pitmen, and we have never been afraid of anything in our lives. This is why I am sure we are again going to demonstrate to the common people that we will get the maximum of coal that lies in our power; that we will eliminate avoidable absenteeism; that we will get our best men on the Pit Consultative Committees and fight to see that our practical experience in each mine is reflected in the character of the suggestions we have to put forward.

On our part we promise you service that is the best any Trade Union can give,

but we have also a right to expect that there shall be an end to unofficial strikes. We know the difficulties and sometimes the provocation, but you now have machinery for settling problems as they arise that you never had before; it is a crime against our own people that unofficial strikes should take place, and we advise you in your own interest to watch very carefully those who so readily call on you to strike. They are not your friends; they have other axes to grind than yours. Be on your guard against them.

The Officers of this Union in whatever sphere or capacity they operate are under the obligation to take the earliest attempt to deal with any and every grievance, and therefore it is incumbent upon our members to use the machinery and to cease the phase of operations that used to be conducted against the coal owners, often at a terrible price.

This organisation is a democratic organisation and there are the utmost facilities for discussion of all those problems which concern the human element and those who indulge in these stoppages are only belittling their own organisation.

The time in my view has come for very plain speaking on this matter. No stoppages can be justified, having regard to the present dire need for coal. In view of all the circumstances, no miners in the world enjoy a higher standard than the British miners have obtained within so short a period. Within one generation we have stepped from the position of being veritable slaves of the lamp to being the joint participators in the ownership, well-being and welfare of the industry. The National Coal Board has met us fairly and squarely. They have done more this year, in the period in which they have operated, than has been done in the last half century. They are only too willing to be given the opportunity to discuss those problems that arise in our day-to-day life and therefore our members must cease this bad practice from the past.

In civic affairs miners have shown that they could prove themselves capable and efficient administrators who have been the admiration of the democratic world. The opportunity in the industrial sphere is here now and let us hope that we can visualise a position this year in which we shall forget and lay to one side this stoppage of pits on any pretext and play the part that men play who accept their responsibilities and duties.

The new occasion of public ownership must teach a new duty. Our members in the past year have given an example to the world's workers of a high standard of duty to their nation. It has called forth praise from some of our most bitter critics of the past. It is therefore imperative that those stoppages to which we have referred shall cease, and nothing we do should tarnish the very proud record and glorious achievement of the mass of our fellows. We are not unmindful of the fact that here and there may be persons in charge of pits who wish to cling to their traditional role of the past. They too must understand that they are no longer there as the boss of the nineteenth century. Their function and outlook must change with the new level at which the pits are now operating. There are now no opposing sides in this industry, all engaged therein must realise that the isolation of the past is no more.

The nation has resources which have not yet been fully organised. There are

millions who are engaged in non-essential work. It must be ended. Hundreds of thousands of workers are employed in occupations which have no place in the present situation. Who can defend at this crisis in our destiny the fact that betting pools, distributive and luxury trades take up so much of our manpower? We cannot afford to meander through our difficulties and hope for the best, whether it is in the form of another loan or not. We can and will solve the situation, but we have the right to demand from everyone that they shall cease to give the impression that month after month can go by without doing anything decisive on the economic front.

INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNIONISM

I am glad to report that since we last met, we have been in conference with the miners of many lands. We have common problems to solve, and we are stronger to do so when we can frequently meet and exchange opinions, ideas and experiences. I am also pleased that the work of the World Federation of Trade Unions goes from strength to strength. Its deputations to many countries can only result in strengthening the bonds of international solidarity and friendship between the peoples of the world.

The W.F.T.U. has not hesitated to put its viewpoint on every aspect of the international situation which closely concerns the Trade Unionists of all lands, and in particular I welcome its initiative in formulating proposals to the International Trade Conference now being held at Geneva. Time will show that if more governments had supported them, we should have been in a stronger position to face some of the economic problems that are looming sharply ahead.

The International Labour Office has got into full working order again, and at a Coal Conference in Geneva in May, a real step forward took place. It is an endeavour to bring to all countries an understanding of what coal means to the world—with real, far-reaching, vital improvements for the miners of the world. At last we know that no longer will they be the forgotten men, but will reach a status that their work demands from their nations.

I take this opportunity of greeting the miners of all lands. We have always been proud of our international connections, and the fact that we miners have always been in the very vanguard of the Labour Movement. I am sure that we all stand solidly for economic prosperity and lasting peace, and that no imperialist power will ever make us go to war against each other again.

CONCLUSION

I conclude on this note : Grave as are Britain's problems, I refuse to subscribe to the doctrine that we are down and out, or dependent on any nation's charity or its predatory aims disguised by handing out dollars.

Our greatest and brightest days are ahead of us. It is now the proud honour of the British working-class to lead the people out of the present serious situation into a really new way of life, in which the exploitation of one man by another shall have ceased; in which the resources of the nation are used for the happiness and wellbeing of its people; in which we live in co-operation and fraternity with all the common peoples of the world; in which the hateful past shall give place to a glorious future.

In following this policy we remain true to the aims of our grand old pioneers, men like Keir Hardie, Bob Smillie, Arthur Cook, to countless others who died in Spain as their sacrifice to try and prevent the advance of Fascism, to the tens of thousands who died on land, sea and in the air during the war against Fascism, to those who have been killed, wounded and maimed following the honoured calling of miners, and the nation's dire necessity has at last won for us a new recognition of our place in the sun.

It is a place we shall never surrender. It is a place to which we shall, by our common labours, give an added lustre that will yet illuminate the world.

To our Labour Government we say, we are amongst your strongest and most solid supporters; go ahead, "Confound your enemies, frustrate their knavish tricks," and you will find always the miners to fight and succour you in dark days or bright days. We were the first to send Labour men to the House of Commons, we count with pride those who have blazed the trail, we shall continue to keep the flag flying and the light ever bright.