

## PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS

MR. J. BOWMAN (Vice-President) : Once again it is with great pleasure I ask the President, Mr. Lawther, to deliver to Conference his annual Address.

MR. W. LAWTHOR (President) : Fellow Delegates, Might I take the opportunity in opening this Annual Conference of our Union, of saying, as a native, how much I appreciate that we meet again in an area which, within a few square miles, contains every form of industrial effort that has made this Nation really great. One has not far to move before one encounters coal mines, ship-building, engineering and all those industries without which there would not always be an England that we would care to admire.

As coal is the basis of every industry, it is indeed fitting that we should meet in the North-East at a time when coal is so much to the forefront of our national affairs, and that we should meet in an area that shows by deeds its belief and its faith in the change that distinguishes 1948 from 1938, the last occasion we met in a Conference at Whitley Bay. In that far-off period of but ten years ago, we were emerging from the depression of the result of Tory domination and trickery, and although few realised it, entering the era of the second world war. We are now at the beginning of a new era when we have, without fail, to make a success of our nationalised coalmining industry, for the benefit of the Nation as a whole. I want to address you on that aspect today.

Of all the problems which confront you as delegates, and through you, the whole mining community, it is the success of your industry—yours and the Nation's—that is first and foremost.

I shall not weary you with statistics, except in this one instance. When last we met here in July, 1938, the wages of the Northumberland miners were 9s. 7.52d. per shift, and for the Nation, the figure was £2 15s. 9d. per week. An example of the freedom of which we hear so much from the Tory leaders. You know the change from those dark days. Nationalisation has its critics, but mostly in the non-miner ranks. The members of this Organisation, and their predecessors, urged the step which became a fact, on January 1st, 1947, not only in our own interests, nor on ethical grounds, but because we knew that the only hope for Britain's future lay in a nationalised mining industry. Having urged it, having got it, what then is to be the function of the National Union of Mineworkers, your Union, the organisation of the mineworkers, in the industry?

Let us face the facts, and please remember facts do not cease to exist because one wants to ignore them. The need for factual information is the most important call that the hour makes to us, and it extends to all manner of important questions which can not only cause irritation, but might destroy our future. Of opinions there are an abundance, but facts are real. To a substantial degree, ordinary folk are wise to reactionary propaganda; sometimes it is very clumsy, sometimes clever, but in the main, an appeal to the facts destroys that propaganda. When facts are available as they are today, there is no excuse for ignorance, apathy or alibis. Even serious-minded people are apt to lose patience with those who pretend and assume to lead the world to greater things, and remain slaves to an obsession. Sometimes this takes the form of sheer ambition or craze for the lime-light and often plain self-interest. In any case, it is not in the real interests of the

real people. That attitude is a danger and a menace to progress in a changing world.

We have travelled a long way from those days when strikes used to be called in order to enforce the fact that Trade Unions were the instrument the workers chose to improve their conditions, either in relation to wages or hours, and it is essential to remind you that many of those who now welcome and admire the Trade Union Movement, would, had it been possible, have killed it at birth. Today we have passed that stage and now have the right to discuss all the problems that affect the lives of our members. Unfortunately we still have some members who believe that the recognition and acceptance of that fact by the National Coal Board, means that we are still free to pursue the ways of the past.

Our function is to remain free and independent as a Trade Union. We neither accept nor subscribe to the doctrine that either the Union or the Officials should be at one and the same time, part of the structure for running and owning the industry, and we have in the past, and must in the future, mould our policy and determine the course of action as a Trade Union, acting in the interests of our members. But today we have to accept the new conditions brought about by nationalisation. Those upon whom the burden of running the industry in the national interest, has been thrust, have a responsibility to the Nation. But so has our Union, and here I must repeat what I said last year in relation to unofficial stoppages; they are wrong; they are criminal; they cannot be tolerated or excused. Those who indulge in them must, in their less exuberant moments, realise that in an industry where the utmost facilities and opportunities exist for full, frank and free discussion and consultation, their actions benefit nobody, except those, who, if the opportunity presented itself, would drive you back to the depths from which you have risen.

One of the paradoxes of a free Press, in a free democracy, is that more space and show is given to those who transgress, than to those who are virtuous. The trespasser is made to appear as if his disavowal of agreements was the only news of the moment. Those who publicise the recalcitrants do so often to create the impression that the critics alone are right. The way of the transgressor is exalted!

Recently we have witnessed objections by some of our members to policies of reorganisation and reconstruction, which, in days gone by, they themselves advocated. It is not many years ago that our mining M.P.s urged time and time again that immense organisational changes would, and must, be adopted. Apparently to some of them, changes mean remaining the same. And let me say to some of the self-opinionated, would-be supermen, of whom the Labour Movement always seems to have more than its quota; we will ask for your advice when we feel we require it, but it would have been better if some of you had worked your passage in the industry.

We have noted how some of the managerial side, who were not trade unionists until the advent of nationalisation, talk of revolt, ballots and strikes. Were the situation not fraught with serious consequences, their actions would be an occasion for mirth. To them we say, do not indulge in boyish escapades which are unworthy of those who have a responsibility to their Nation. Their attitude cannot be forgiven, because they ought to know better.

It is sheer lunacy on the part of those who have had, in many instances, educational facilities which were denied to the rest of their fellows, to spend their time manufacturing excuses for their actions, and by so doing, sabotage the sacrifices that the pioneers made for today's successes. No greater examples of indiscipline and anarchy can be found than in those ranks. We never condone that spirit amongst our members, and we are not going to condone it from whatever source it springs.

The gravity of our national plight must bring home to every man and boy in this industry a new outlook in keeping with today's problems. We will not tolerate these mushroom trade unions continually using threats. They are a menace to the industry, and through the industry, to the Nation. We have read a lot about the British way of life; equally true is it that there is a British Trade Union way of conduct in life's affairs, which runs the opposite way to the carping critics who, in the coalfields, claim to speak for men in the industry.

### THE MINERS' CHARTER

Having regard to the resolution relating to the Miners' Charter, which is to be discussed this week, it is desirable that I should clear up a point of misunderstanding which has arisen in the minds of many people. The various claims of the Union, as set out in the Charter, have not been specifically formulated since nationalisation. The Union has constantly pressed, over a period of many years, for reorganisation of the industry; the need for "adequate and careful training of youth" was stressed in the Union's evidence to the Special Government Committee on Juvenile Workers entering the Coalmining Industry, in 1942; the introduction of new safety laws has been urged upon successive Governments for years, and was stressed in the Union's evidence before the Royal Commission on Safety in Coal Mines in 1937; at every Annual Conference I have attended, since my first in 1919, we have adopted resolutions calling for improved compensation rates. The claim of the Union that wages in the coalmining industry should compare favourably with those in any other industry in the country, and the claim for a Five-Day Week in the coalmining industry, as distinct from the claim for a shorter working day, were discussed with the Coalition Government, in 1943. As is well known to every delegate present this morning, the plea for pensions for our aged colleagues has been put forward to Annual Conferences for the past 30 or 40 years.

It is quite wrong, therefore, to suggest that the Union has sought to take advantage of nationalisation to put forward excessive claims which were never pressed on the colliery owners. The Miners' Charter is simply a summary of the claims of the Union, which, in our opinion, should have been conceded years before nationalisation; it is a summary of improvements which are required if we are to attract new recruits to the industry and if we are to retain, by voluntary methods, those already working in the industry.

It is to the credit of the National Coal Board that a number of claims have been conceded by them during the first eighteen months of their control of the industry. Keep that fact in mind when you listen to their critics. The next few months are going to witness a new series of vindictive and malicious attacks on our nationalised industry.

We have no doubt that if these claims are examined on a cash basis, they will explain to the nation's satisfaction the so-called financial deficiency of something like 25 million pounds. We would remind those who view the industry from the financial angle to weigh against the pounds, shillings and pence, the change in human relations which has taken place. Remember too that this period which will be under review, is the same as the one in which there was a corresponding shyness and reluctance on the part of many Britishers, to enter Britain's premier industry, in the hour when Britain needed Coal. For the first time in our history we had to depend on foreigners to assist us. Perhaps too, those Liberal and Tory critics will remember that the real reason why Britishers had been afraid to come to the mines was because Liberal and Tory Governments, in the past, treated the men and boys of our industry as outcasts. This Nation cannot afford to allow these panjandrums who violated every canon of human decency, who used their political and financial power to make mining a term for abuse, who created a feeling of despair and made destitution a virtue in the coalfields, ever again to have the opportunity to play a part in this great industry. To the "cold war" critics of mining nationalisation, we say that the men and boys for whom we speak are sick of your pretences. We no longer fear your fulminations. Do not, we beg you, delude yourselves that anyone in this industry who has existed under your reign of terror, believed you are interested in anything vital or essential to human well-being. You had your chance, but you brought ridicule on even the system of government itself.

When Parliament comes to discuss this first year of nationalisation, might we commend to them the prayer of the Right Reverend the Lord Bishop of Carlisle, at the Memorial Service to the one hundred and four men and boys who lost their lives in the William Pit Disaster :

*We thank Thee for those who in the darkness and danger of the mines labour for our light and comfort. May we never through sin or folly waste the fruits of their toil, but use them reverently, remembering their cost;*

and may we ask that at all times, not only when death and disaster have overtaken our colleagues, those words shall be remembered by our legislators when they discuss matters affecting those who labour for the light and comfort of their Nation, in darkness and ever in danger.

## WAR AND TALK OF WAR

Today we hear talk of a third world war. "Why?" ask the victims of the first and second world wars. Were this not so tragic a subject, no better instance could be given to illustrate the failings of mankind. Everywhere men, women and children are beset with problems which, in some instances, are relics of world war one and certainly are relics of world war two, and yet madmen the world over are talking of world war three, as if we are reaching the stage when war was an ordinary, conceived operation of the human race.

Those who began world war one little knew of the end, and it is within the recollection of all of us that those who began world war two never lived to see the end of it. Might it not be possible to point the lesson that just as two previous wars have wiped out those who originated them, so that might possibly be the fate of those who are responsible for what they term, world war three.

The common men and women everywhere desire, above and beyond all other things, Peace. Their innermost longing and every thought is for Peace. We would be failing in our duty to those in all parts of the world who paid with their lives for PEACE, if we neglected to say that, for organised Labour in general, and miners everywhere, we must have the opportunity to give hope to a shattered world to live in Peace.

In relation to what I have said, I would like to quote from perhaps the most unbiased source that there is in the British Commonwealth of Nations. New Zealand has been held up to us as the supreme example of what Labour has been able to achieve. No one will, for a single moment, suggest that the New Zealand Labour Movement is either Communist, or made up of fellow-travellers, yet in the Editorial of *The Standard*, the weekly newspaper which is the official organ of the New Zealand Labour Movement, for Thursday, April 15th, appears the following :

“The greatest menace to the peace of mind of the peoples of the world today is the war propaganda which is being deliberately circulated by a large section of the Press. Probably never before in the world’s history has the Press been responsible for so much mischief as at present. At a time when we are told that no nation wants or could bear the strain of another war—and certainly no private citizens anywhere who have any sanity desire to see the world plunged into another war—false reports are being published which are conditioning the people for war. . . .

“This criminal propaganda, which, if persisted in, will most certainly lead to war, should be stopped without delay. The people are entitled to fair and honest presentation of the facts of the international situation, but so long as we allow complete and unfettered freedom of the Press, it is difficult to see how the mighty Press monopolies can be induced to tell the people the plain truth. . . .

“There is today too great a tendency to forget the appalling human and material destruction in the recent war and to allow too free a scope for propaganda by the armament manufacturers in playing on the fears of the masses. That must stop even if it means placing restrictions on the freedom of the Press. War propaganda is Enemy No. 1. . . .”

We know how easy it is to blame the other fellow for being responsible. We have staked our faith in the organisation which was born in the latter days of the agonies of World War II, the United Nations Organisation. We are still of that faith. It is a travesty of the faith which inspired those who gave their lives in that struggle, to listen to commentators, and to read of the frustration which seems to have entered into the Parliament of Man at Lake Success. Is it to go on record once again that we allowed haggling and intrigue to go so far that nothing could be done to save the world from a further attempt to destroy it?

And on that note I end, in the hope that this week’s deliberations will be of service to our members and to our Nation.