



## **RECOGNITION FOR MINERS`? - "NO WILL, NO WAY"?!**

Winston Churchill, Britain's War-Time Prime Minister is quoted as saying that "the Miners would be able to stand as equals with the fighter pilots, the merchant seamen & the soldiers for recognition of their efforts during wartime".



That recognition is still lacking - in point of fact, it could be said that "the miners were viewed as the forgotten contributors to the War Effort". However not all miners were forgotten, the Labour Government decided to recognise the efforts of the men conscripted into the collieries during the Second World War by presenting commemorative badges to these men and posthumously to their families in other cases. The Bevin Boys were also honoured by the raising of a memorial in their honour at the National Arboretum in Staffordshire. In 1943 the Minister of Labour in the War-Time Coalition Government Ernest Bevin, stated following placing the Coal Mining Industry in the "Schedule of Reserved Occupations & Protected Work" "We need 720,000 men continuously employed in this Industry, [43,000 men were conscripted into the Coal Mines of Britain] this is where you boys come in, our fighting men will not be able to achieve their purpose unless we get an adequate supply of coal".

Mr Bevin had indeed heeded the lessons of the last conflict, the Great War, supposedly "the War to end all Wars", when so many men left the pits to enlist, that the Coal Industry became so short of men that the War was in danger of being lost on the "Home Front", [service men got "3 square meals a day", miners during 1914-1918 were lucky to get one!] Will Lawther [in his address to the first Annual Conference of the National Union of Mineworkers held in Blackpool on 25<sup>th</sup> June 1945, paid tribute to the vital part in the "victory played by the miners", "despite the shortage of manpower, the poor quality of timber & belting, as well as other supplies, the shortage of food they have cut and raised the coal to enable the War Effort to go forward".

In particular he paid tribute to "our older members who have carried such a heavy burden, over 100,000 over the age of 55, large numbers over the age of 65 & in some cases 70 years of age! These truly are the heroes of Labour"! At this juncture I would draw the readers` attention to the fact that those who wish to access Mr Lawther's speech in its entirety [either by contacting the NUM Offices in Barnsley where copies can be sent out or via the NUM Web Site <http://num.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/1945-Presidents-Address-25-06-1945-Will-Lawther.pdf> its content, including the important references to death by accident and Industrial Disease and poor compensation is well worth reading.



Records compiled by the British Labour Statistics [Historical Abstract {1971}] bear out Mr Lawther's statement and worries, when the numbers of fatalities are taken into account over specified periods of time. It is never easy to confidently and accurately state Industrial

Death Statistics during war-time due to reporting restrictions in place to maintain morale. However, the following statistics should be considered when mentioning War Effort and Recognition.

DATE RANGE	DEATHS IN COAL MINING
1910-1914	7,288
1915-1919	6,499
1935-1939	4,151
1940-1944	4,063
1945-1949	2,639
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>24,610</b>

Notwithstanding that the Date Ranges considerably fall outside the Armed Conflict Dates it still illustrates that if we concentrate solely upon these dates that do “fall within the ranges” the Total is still a significant number that lost their lives at work. These totals do not take into account Death by Industrial Disease or serious injuries that occurred at this time.

There is an overwhelming sense of “injustice” that prevails over the Coalfield Communities notwithstanding the comments of a certain Prime Minister when labelling Miners infamously as “The Enemy Within”! This is borne out by a number of factors, I ask you the reader to consider the following, **quotes taken from politicians**, either from statement or written response: The Debate in the House of Commons 23<sup>rd</sup> October 1945 {“Directed Mineworkers”} available via “Hansard “heard a motion from Flight Lieutenant Teeling [Brighton] who was championing the immediate “demobilisation” of the “Bevin Boys” who he deemed “were young men wrecking their lives”, that they had to “walk 1 ½ miles to work, on the night shift, that they took their own sandwiches that they had to pay for themselves, that their sweat and coal dust did not make them particularly edible, they get paid £3.10s per week whereas the waiters in this House get double that amount, that Absenteeism is a growing problem” amongst other observations regarding their general welfare, Lieutenant-Colonel Dower {Cockermouth} felt his colleague had “performed a Public Duty in bringing to light the conditions and problems connected with the `Bevin Boys` he goes onto state “these boys without exception were willing to fight and if necessary die for their Country”!

I would love to have been in the position to question him “so what have the so-called `boys` in the table of statistics above, done”? Are their lives so truly expendable that they can be “air-brushed” out of history?



This debate however was the fore runner of today's debate regarding recognition and the awarding of medals, Mr Ness Edwards (the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Labour agreed "that the `Bevin Boys` played a very great part in winning this war" he went onto to make the point that everyone in the reserved occupations deserved to be recognised not just the `Bevin Boys` however 60 years or so later we arrived at that very position.

We then move onto the contentious point about who decides the issue on merit, again via "Hansard" in May 2008, Jon Trickett MP queries that there should be an "award for those miners who worked in the mines during the Second World War equivalent to the `Bevin Boys Badge` ? The response from John Hutton (who the Reader should be aware ignored my correspondence questioning when did he have "**further discussions with Members on both sides of the House regarding the heroic contribution of the miners**") he also stated that "practical difficulties should not be under estimated - the issue of accurate records to confirm employment in the pre-nationalised mining industry, which was also quoted by R.H. Matthew Hancock in 2014, by R.H. David Cameron and by Michael Fallon in 2013 who quote the **same** "non-availability of records" yet to qualify for this "meritorious award" the "Claimant" to obtain the award, simply completes the A4 size form and sends it to the Coal Liabilities Unit of the relevant Government Department ! It has been possible however to **make 5,100** such awards up to 2016 as answered by Andrea Leadsom MP to David Anderson MP's query! It would appear to the "writer of this article" Civil Servants are yet again dictating policy against the Mining Communities.

In order to keep the issue in the "Public Eye" I urge everyone to either attend at their local Colliery Memorial or War Memorial on Armistice Day and remember the ultimate sacrifice made by Coal Miners and the part they made in "*Keeping the Home Fires Burning & the Wheels of Industry Turning*". Remember them with the same respect afforded to others especially the members of the Armed Forces and request they receive the same privileges given to the `Bevin Boys`.

*CHRIS SKIDMORE (Yorkshire Area NUM Chairman)*

