

Take over the mines!



The case for nationalisation

By Harry Pollitt

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TAKE OVER THE MINES

by HARRY POLLITT

B **BRITAIN** needs coal. The provision of it is not only the responsibility of the miners, but of every citizen in Britain.

But it can only be got on the scale now required on one condition, that the Government adopts a policy in regard to the coal industry that can win the complete confidence of the miners.

For it is upon the existing workers in the mines that Britain depends for that increased output which alone can solve the existing coal shortage. All the schemes for training new miners are long-term schemes, and cannot affect output in the critical period ahead.

Production has fallen for a variety of reasons :

1. **Insufficient number of mineworkers, especially coal hewers.**
2. **Wastage of highly-skilled mineworkers, through accident, disease, old age and death.**
3. **Four years' increase in average age of mineworkers.**
4. **Physical exhaustion after four years' continuous labour with insufficient food.**
5. **Breakdowns in plant and machinery, and lack of spare parts for repairs.**
6. **General discontent because of Government attitude towards taking over the mines (thus permitting bad management to continue) and because of bad handling of labour questions.**

The result is that stocks are low and are being seriously reduced. The demand for coal is increasing as the war moves into its last decisive stages. We need, especially at home, to be assured of stocks of coal in every vital industrial and transport centre, so as to guarantee continuity of production if vital means of communication are interrupted by bombing when once the Second Front opens, and to provide the minimum essential for the civil population. We need ample stocks so that immediately

any part of Europe is liberated from Fascism, coal can be sent there, to maintain essential services, and help our army's advance.

Unless we can achieve this position, then we must face the danger that the war will be prolonged, not because of Hitler's military resistance, but through a shortage of coal. Let it be clearly realised what this means. Great sacrifices on the part of the civilian population, a heavier death roll for the armed forces, and further opportunities for Fascism.

In recent spontaneous strikes, there has been a senseless and irresponsible attitude of hostility to the miners on the part of certain sections of the press, which is dangerous in the extreme. The miners have been slandered in leading articles and cartoons, and the general public should understand that this attitude can only serve to deepen the miners' sense of injustice, thus pouring oil on the fire. And fires these days have a habit of spreading.

WHAT COAL IS REQUIRED

To meet the needs of war, and be ready for the demands of peace, this country must produce 220 million tons of coal a year as against the approximate 190 million tons produced at present. Even the present output is tending to fall every month.

This result cannot be achieved with the existing manpower of approximately 700,000 men and youths.

A further 90,000 men are essential to guarantee the necessary coal production and the continued recruitment must be maintained of approximately 30,000 per year to make up for wastage, due to workers leaving the industry at this rate because of old age, injury, sickness or death.

RELUCTANCE TO ENTER THE MINES

We witness the greatest reluctance to enter the pits. Every effort along voluntary lines to increase the number of mine-workers has been a dismal failure. Conscription has had to be resorted to since January 1, 1944. This has brought about more opposition and resistance than any other act of the Government on the domestic front since this war commenced.

Every day we read of the hostility towards entering the mining industry. One day it will be a letter from some middle-class

person in the *Daily Telegraph* (the coalowners' newspaper) protesting against their sons being called upon to enter the mines and putting forward the idea that coal-mining is only for men "of low calibre." The next day we read of a Grammar school boy who has committed suicide rather than enter the mines when he had been conscripted to do so. The day after that we are told of another preferring to be sent to prison rather than enter the mining industry, and declaring that he was prepared to join any section of the Armed Forces instead.

This hostility to enter the mines, whereas there is willingness to enter any other industry, is noted with bitterness by every miner. It shows the widespread change needed in the mining industry and justifies the miners' resentment against criticism from people who openly declare that they would never think of going into the mines to work themselves.

WHAT LED TO THE PORTER AWARD

In 1942 we saw the establishment of the Ministry of Fuel and Power. The present scheme of limited and contradictory control did not represent the policy of the miners, who for years have demanded, with the support of the whole Labour movement, the nationalisation of the mines as the only real solution of all the outstanding problems in the industry.

Notwithstanding this view, however, the miners have tried to work the scheme in a sincere effort to try and increase production. The control scheme as at present operated has not only failed to win the confidence of the miners, but has been hopeless in bringing any change in production, as it left the owners and their managers and the chaotic system they represent in the same key position as before. It has not produced the results. The new scheme now for grouping the pits under a District Control has again been condemned by the Miners' Federation as farcical. Results are the only thing that count. New proposals are therefore needed.

The Greene Award gave an all-round increase of wages of 2s. 6d. a shift, and for the first time established a national minimum wage, fixed at 83/- underground and 78/- on the surface.

Its proposals for an output bonus on a district basis have,

however, failed to produce the increased output that was anticipated, because, unlike the engineering industry, there was no personal incentive in the scheme, since the miner only receives an increase if the whole district coalfield achieved the set target. In the autumn of 1943, the Mineworkers' Federation, in their desire to remove obstacles that stood in the way of obtaining the necessary production of coal, put forward a series of new proposals in regard to wages, conditions, compensation, food, clothing, priority for all mining machinery, the abolition of Dual Control, and the requisitioning of the mines by the State, thus establishing complete control of the industry.

The Government declared it could not accept these proposals, at the same time informing the Miners' Federation that their wages claim must be placed before the National Board for the Mining Industry. At the Tribunal, over which Lord Porter presided, a claim was made for a minimum wage of £5 10s. per week for surface workers, £6 for underground workers, with proportionate increases for piece workers and youths. The Porter Tribunal made an award which gave a minimum wage of £4 10s. for surface workers, £5 for underground workers, with new and variable minimums for youths. In regard to piece workers, it stated: "A rise in piece rate is not awarded as, in the view of the Tribunal, it is inconsistent with the granting of what is merely a minimum wage."

The Porter Award is of great importance. It has firmly established the national minimum wage principle introduced by the Greene Award for the first time in June, 1942. At the same time, the greatest criticism can be levelled at the failure to appreciate the key position the piece workers occupy and the fact that any wages award that does not give them an advance in their earnings proportionate to that given to day-wage workers is bound to militate against increased production.

At a special conference of the M.F.G.B. to consider the Award, the delegates welcomed the minimum wage proposals as a big step forward, but warned the Government of the danger arising out of the rejection of the piece workers' demand and the continuation of the anomalies as they affected certain classes of day-wage workers. The Executive Council of the Miners' Federation was instructed to deal with these matters, and it was on this basis that the miners, with the full knowledge of the

Government, opened negotiations with the owners for this purpose.

It was clear that in a number of coalfields like South Wales, Durham, Northumberland and Scotland, which in general are the lower-paid coalfields as compared with certain Midlands districts, this Award would create special kinds of anomalies by telescoping all day-wage men, skilled and unskilled, into the Minimum rate, so that all received the same pay, whilst youths were shabbily dealt with, especially those under 18 years of age, who received no increase from the Award as a general rule. Moreover, it created resentment throughout the coal-fields as a whole, because it gave nothing extra to piece workers and tended, as a consequence, to make no appreciable difference between the wages of day workers and wages of piece workers.

THE SOUTH WALES STRIKE

The whole controversy about the Porter Award was brought to a head by the recent strike in South Wales.

The responsibility for the strike of over 90,000 South Wales miners, and the loss of approximately 500,000 tons of coal, must be squarely placed on the Government. Never in the history of important wage negotiations have there been such stupid blunders as in the application of the Porter Award.

I stated in a speech in London on February 13th, "if the Government and the coalowners were deliberately trying to provoke a national strike throughout the coalfields, they could not be going about it in a better way than through their attempts to avoid the full obligations imposed upon them by the recent Porter Award."

They permitted the impression that once the Mineworkers' Federation and coalowners had come to an agreement in regard to various anomalies, they would be paid for out of the Coal Charges Fund. It is now alleged that the Government informed the coalowners they would not be responsible for meeting the cost of settling any of the anomalies, but what is certain is that the miners did not know this. The Government's announcement *after* agreements had been reached, came as a bombshell to the miners throughout the country.

Then on the very week-end that the miners were expecting to

be informed of the first payments to be made under the Porter Award, it became known that in South Wales various allowances, some of which are of over fifty years' standing, would be treated as part of the minimum wage. This meant that thousands of miners who had been expecting a substantial advance would receive very little, and in many cases nothing at all. Thus, for instance, colliers who were receiving 6/6 allowance over the previous minimum for working in water or in specially dusty or dangerous conditions, would be deprived of these allowances under the Porter Award.

Can it be that there are certain forces in this country who are trying to prevent or delay the opening of the Second Front by resorting to tactics that can lead to mass strikes in the most important war industry in Britain, and thereby afford the excuse that we are not yet ready?

This thought is being widely expressed as serious-minded people contemplate what is happening in the coalfields.

To make matters worse, this provocation occurs in an industry which is not only the most important in these last decisive stages of the war, but also where the miners have been shamefully treated for generations, and where there is a heritage of hate and suspicion against coalowners and governments.

To give a practical example of the kind of provocation put up by the coalowners—a recent award to miners secured a national overtime agreement which gave substantial gains to the miners in all coalfields. The costs are to be met out of the Coal Charges Fund. This Agreement is being interpreted in a mean and niggardly fashion by the owners and delay is caused in putting this Award into operation because of this. Some coalowners immediately endeavoured to avoid paying the increased overtime rates that the Award had given the miners by altering the methods of shift working so as to avoid paying the extra. They did this despite the fact that the old shift times had been in operation for generations past.

It should be noted that these shifts were essential for the unbroken continuity of production and a clear start on the Monday morning. Some owners in certain districts likewise tried to wriggle out of paying the minimum to aged and infirm miners and to men on partial compensation. In Scotland some owners, in applying the new overtime agreement deducted the

2s.4d. Greene Award and 1s. attendance bonus, despite the fact that the Porter Award stated the new overtime rates were to be paid on gross earnings.

The coalowners not being content with the anomalies created by the Porter Award went out of their way to aggravate the position still worse by placing wrong interpretations on the Porter Award. The same conditions governing the Lord Greene Award had to apply to the operation of the Porter Award. In spite of this we found the coalowners openly violating the Lord Greene rulings both in regard to the payment of the minimum weekly wage and the payment for overtime.

No two coal companies operated the same policy, thereby creating disunity and confusion amongst the miners. In some cases they even refused to pay men on partial compensation the guaranteed wage, in spite of the fact that Lord Greene had already given a ruling which was accepted by the owners. that men would be paid the full guaranteed weekly wage in addition to partial compensation. Unscrupulous managers at the instigation of unscrupulous owners went round the pits and asked men who were up in years if they were prepared to do certain heavy jobs, and if the miner said he was not able, he was classified as an aged or infirm worker and refused payment. Some miners don't call this provocation, they call it sabotage.

No sensible person believes that miners come out on strike because they want to work off old scores, or because they do not grasp the urgency of the present war situation. The miners are those who hate Fascism the most, they have tens and tens of thousands of their sons in the armed forces, but they cannot be played with in this shameful manner without the risk that they will hit back.

The miners need to be strongly on guard against themselves becoming susceptible to deliberate provocation, either from the side of the Government, coalowners, or Trotskyite and I.L.P. reactionary elements.

The coalowners are tireless in their suggestions that the whole position in the coalfields is because of State control, when the facts are that if there were real economic and financial control by the State, the present coal crisis would never have arisen.

It is being said that the miners have received very substantial gains during the war. This is true, and they have all been won by negotiation and not by strikes. But it must also be

remembered that at the beginning of this war the miners were amongst the lowest paid section of workers in this country, and they are not yet by any means highly paid, despite the danger of their calling. The depressed wage levels of the pre-war years, based on heavy unemployment, cannot be taken as a standard.

The coalowners never give up the struggle to keep the pits in their own hands. They will resort to every conceivable manoeuvre to discredit any form of State control, however limited and inadequate. They are not worried about the strikes. On the contrary, they seize the opportunity to suggest that the strikes only arise because of Government interference.

We appeal to the miners to stand by the agreements made by their responsible leaders; we appeal to them to spurn provocative actions that result in unnecessary strikes, that can lead to a prolongation of the war, with all the sacrifices this must entail for themselves and the majority of the common people.

We are confident that what they are out to win can only be won without any strikes, for these can hurt the miners more than anyone else. They can create misunderstanding; they can cause disunity as between one coalfield and another, between one section of the movement and another, between the workers in industry and those in the Forces; they can impede the organisation of One Union for the mining industry.

It is because of all these things that we express the opinion that the Government, in expecting the miners to face their responsibilities, must also face its own, and end once and for all the present stupid policy of delay and provocation so far as the miners are concerned.

REVISION OF THE WAGE STRUCTURE

When the Porter Award was made, it also contained the following statement :—

"The Tribunal end by expressing their view that the award is only a temporary expedient which will give an opportunity for a general overhaul in the wage structure and the general conditions of the industry, as is long overdue. They have dealt only with such urgent matters as the present claim and position demand . . . "

Early in March, the Ministry of Fuel and Power met the Mineworkers' Federation of Great Britain and the Mining

Association in relation to this recommendation, and placed the following proposals before them as a basis of negotiation between the Mineworkers' Federation, the coalowners and the Government:—

- (1) The only flat rate addition to wages would be the cost-of-living bonus.
- (2) In the case of day wages, the other flat rate advances and the ascertainment and other percentages would be consolidated into the day wage.
- (3) To the basic piece rate wages would be added the existing ascertainment and other percentages, which would be further increased by the percentage which the flat rate (other than cost-of-living bonus) bears to the effective district minimum shift wage. The new piece rate would ensure that for the same output there would be no reduction in piece rate earnings; rather in most cases there would be an appreciable increase in earnings.
- (4) The resulting revised rates and the existing minima should be continued by an agreement between the two sides of the industry until December, 1947, at which date either side might give six months' notice of amendment or termination of the agreement.

We do not think that the new proposals will bring about a completely satisfactory answer, because that is only possible on the basis of nationalisation and national planning of coal production. However, certain important, positive gains are possible of achievement on the basis of the above proposals.

Firstly, the miners' wages will be stabilised until June, 1948, six months' notice by either side to terminate the Agreement can be given in December, 1947, which is in fact the longest stabilisation of wages agreement that has yet been proposed in this country. This will help to remove the fears of the miners that immediately the war against Fascism is won, the war on their wages begins.

Secondly, the proposals will meet the claim of pieceworkers and will give the craftsmen employed in and about the mines increased wages which will help to give the craftsmen the recognition their skill demands. They do not meet the case of the skilled underground worker, nor do they meet the claims of youths under 18 years of age. The Federation has failed to secure the removal of these anomalies, due to a Cabinet decision,

and the discrimination against these men will cause serious resentment.

Many of these key workers who perform similar work to piece workers, or jobs on the speed and efficiency of which the piece workers depend, are on flat rates. The failure to give full consideration to the special position of these men and boys is another Government blunder of the worst type.

The allowances position, re payment for dust, water, etc., has now been settled. It ought never to have arisen. It was an important contributory fact in the South Wales strikes, and the Government must accept responsibility for this.

The storm over the first anomalies should be a warning to the Government not to allow the owners to continue their cheese-paring policy. At present they are fighting a rearguard action, throwing up every possible snag and difficulty, so that as fast as one anomaly is removed another is created. The sum needed to meet all the anomaly claims in full are trifling in comparison with the total cost of coal, let alone the cost of the war. But small injustices and pin-pricks may have terribly serious consequences in this critically serious situation.

THE ONLY REAL SOLUTION—NATIONALISATION

A position has now been reached, in the paramount coal crisis this country is faced with, where only at our peril dare we any longer refuse to effect the only real solution of the problems—the nationalisation of the mining industry.

Coal there has been and is in abundance in Britain—the only raw material of which this can be said. But it has been worked for hundreds of years solely in the interests of profit; and today the net results can no longer be ignored. The coalowners have wasted the industry's resources, shamelessly exploited the miners, ruthlessly attacked their organisations, driven their local leaders from the villages, shown a cynical disregard for their safety, neglected the technical organisation of the industry, and proved themselves throughout the history of coalmining to be the most reactionary and backward section of the employing class of Britain.

Such was the neglect, inefficiency and mismanagement that even 25 years ago Lord Sankey, Chairman of the Royal Commission on the Coal Industry of 1919, stated in his report

that "The private ownership of the coal industry stood condemned," and made the following recommendations to the Government of that time:

- "1. I recommend that Parliament be invited immediately to pass legislation acquiring the coal royalties for the State, paying fair and just compensation to the owners.
- "2. I recommend, on the evidence before me, that the principle of State ownership of the coal mines be accepted."

The miners have not forgotten how Mr. Bonar Law pledged the Government of the day to accept the Sankey report "in spirit and letter"; but though the majority of the Commission came out for nationalisation, nothing whatever was done.

Mining is the only major industry in this country which, after the most exhaustive investigation guided by an eminent member of the legal profession and House of Lords, that has ever been recommended for nationalisation. Surely this fact carries its own moral.

The fact that the people did not compel the Government of the day to carry out this policy is the major cause of the present coal crisis. This is the reason why the question of who is in control of the mines can no longer be shirked. It is the major political question confronting Britain.

In the coalowners' latest plea against nationalisation, Mr. A. K. McCosh (Chairman of the Scottish Colliery Owners, Ex-President of British Iron and Steel Federation, Chairman of Bairds and Scottish Steel and director of Bairds & Dalwellingtons and of L.N.E.R.) suggests that rather than nationalise the industry the miners should "get rid of their raw deal complex." Indeed, there is now a steady stream of propaganda designed to suggest to the public that the miner's peculiar "psychology" is responsible for the sense of grievance and the demand for nationalisation.

But the facts of history speak for themselves without any question of a "raw deal complex." The Sir John Forster Committee, appointed by the Government in 1942 to enquire into the reasons why boys were not entering the mines, gave as the main reasons the bad record of unemployment, the low wages, the lack of a safety provision and training for youth and the shocking housing and welfare conditions in mining villages.

Has the Forster Committee also a "raw deal" complex? Between the two wars, wages were cut and short-time working developed to such an extent that average earnings in 1932 over the whole country were only 42s. a week. Yet even now you get the coalowners complaining that output has fallen because "wages were too high."

Accident rates have not been reduced because, although the knowledge of the causes of mining disasters was increasing, the owners were not prepared to spend money on the necessary precautions. The fatal accident rate has been rising since 1926, and the latest figures (1941-42) show a death-roll of 130 men per 100,000 employed, which is as high as in 1900. Every year one miner in every five becomes a compensation case due to accident in the pit, and the greater part of these accidents could have been avoided but for the continual conflict between safety and profits.

So much for their record on welfare. But, at least, the coal-owners argue, "coal was being produced with great efficiency before the war."

Nothing could be more untrue. Speeding up of the miner there had certainly been; especially since 1926, the length of his shift had been increased and some mechanisation introduced. There was a drive for coal at the expense of safety. The new pits and coalfields were, naturally, more efficient than the old. But there was no bold, large-scale replanning of the industry, sinking of new shafts, dewatering of flooded pits, development of underground gasification; while the most modern forms of labour-saving machinery, such as the power-loaders extensively used even before the war in America, were unknown. The percentage of coal cut and handled by machine was lower than in other countries, and much of the machinery in use, both in the pits and in washeries and by-product plants, was antiquated and wasteful.

This accounts for the fact that when the world coalmining industry was surveyed by the International Labour Office in a report issued in 1938, they found that output per shift in Britain was only a little over a quarter that in the bituminous mines of the U.S.A.; in Poland the output was two-thirds higher, in Germany (Ruhr) about 50 per cent higher, and in Czechoslovakia over 20 per cent higher than in Britain. The proportion cut by

machine was higher in Germany, U.S.A., France, Belgium, U.S.S.R. than in Britain. Most significant of all, British mining in 1936 showed a smaller increase in output per shift since 1913 than any other major country.

Output here rose by under 10 per cent, but in the U.S.S.R. by 72 per cent, in Czechoslovakia by 50 per cent and in the U.S.A. by 25 per cent.

By the cold test of business efficiency apart altogether from the exploitation and suffering of the miners, the administration of the industry by the coalowners stood condemned.

The point has been reached where businessmen in other industries are gravely worried about the inefficiency, and have expressed the view that the failure of private enterprise in ensuring satisfactory working conditions resulted primarily "from the failure to return a sufficiently high proportion of the earnings to improvement of the mines, development of mining methods and research on mining and utilisation of the product. Instead, earnings were distributed as interest on capital and, therefore, dissipated as far as the mines were concerned." (C. C. Devereux, Chairman, High Duty Alloys in "Post-War Reconstruction of Industry in South Wales," 1943.)

Other authorities, such as the Parliamentary and Scientific Committee in its 1943 report, show anxiety about the failure of industry to spend adequately on research, and the consequent high and increasing price of coal. The new departure of £200,000 per annum spent on coal utilisation research is only scratching the surface of what needs to be done to develop efficiency, not only on the consumption but on the production side.

By this time the chaos is on an enormous scale, and the action needed to end it must therefore also be drastic and far-reaching. This is why the nation can no longer evade its responsibility.

During the course of this war, the Government has been forced to take the first steps in the direction of instituting some form of control over the industry. Indeed, so deep-seated, so well-founded and so bitter is the hatred of the miners for the present ownership and running of the industry that, as Will Lawther said in London on March 22nd, 1944:—

"If the mines were not subject to even the elementary and inadequate forms of control they are today—and in passing

it must be understood that this is a form of control that leaves the last word in regard to the working and organisation of the pits in the hands of the coalowners—there is no power in Britain that would keep the miners working under such conditions. They are only tolerating them now because of their intense hatred of Fascism, and their desire to win the war as quickly as possible."

When the Government first introduced its wartime scheme of control in 1943, it laid down that the main means of getting an immediate increase in output were (a) concentration of output in the most productive pits, and in the most productive seams and districts within each pit; (b) improved mechanisation and technical methods; (c) use of the pit production committees. But this side of the control has been allowed to fall into the background and very little has been done, because of the opposition of the vested interests in the industry. Control has been a matter of ordering the miners about, not the owners. Concentration schemes have touched only 1 pit in 20; modern American machinery is not in operation at more than a dozen mines; the tonnage cut by machine is no higher now than before the war (although because of the fall in total output the percentage of machine-cut works out higher). There are still grave man-power shortages at pits producing two tons a man shift, while others with 12-15 cwt. are still allowed to go on working to capacity.

Under the system of the Coal Charges Account the Government has allowed the owners to increase prices not only by the amount necessary to meet increases in wages, but also to provide funds to maintain "necessitous" (unprofitable) collieries in production and to guarantee a "reasonable return" to the industry. The coal consumer is thus paying to keep private ownership in the saddle. This system has given the main combines profits and dividends well in excess of pre-war, and has also guaranteed a basic income to the vested interests irrespective of production. The owners have found themselves, in contrast to peace-time, in a position to sell at high prices not merely the good quality coal they could produce, but a high percentage of bad quality and dirty coal. Allowing for E.P.T., there is little financial incentive either to get maximum production, to mechanise the mines or to concentrate on the most productive pits and seams.

How does this work out in the day-to-day work of the mines?

Evidence on this point was given in Parliament (October 13, 1943) by Mr. Thomas Fraser, Labour M.P. for Hamilton, who was still working at the face in 1943, and was joint chairman of a Pit Production Committee till he entered the House:

"Some reference has been made to the allegation by certain miners and certain trade unionists that the mineowners are working their mines with an eye to the future. Everyone seems to challenge that statement and people are always asking whether there is any proof of it. On the Pit Production Committee of which I was joint chairman we have on dozens of occasions argued that the manager was working his pit with an eye to the future, that he was working poor quality seams today to a greater extent than was ever done between the two wars. That allegation could not be refuted. It was 100 per cent true. They are working low quality seams because they cannot hope to sell the coal after the war. I challenge anyone to make an examination of that colliery and to refute that statement. When it was put to the manager that he was working a bigger percentage of so-called dirty coal, he said: 'Yes, but it cannot be avoided. We worked the good seams when we had to look for markets.' At the same time he is making preparation to work what is left of the good seams at another time. There are in the colliery five or six different seams. When times are difficult for the coalowners, or in times of peace when there is competition for coal, they work the best quality seams, but in time of war, when they can sell anything that is black, they work any kind of coal. That is my experience. That is what has happened in the colliery in which I worked.

"Perhaps a more disgraceful case was that of the Braehead Colliery in Lanarkshire, which was finding some difficulty in maintaining its output. I believe it was some time ago considered advisable to close the colliery because of a decline in output. I understand that the owners were very keen in that place to be allowed to work a section of mill coal, which is a fairly high seam, easily workable and of good quality coal, along with the over-developments in the pit, and in order that the coal output should be maintained at a high standard. The coal they wished to work was over the barrier. They wanted to work a strip of some 720 yards, which I believe belonged to a neighbouring coal company that was in the field over which the Southfield Colliery had the rights. These people were denied the right to work the coal." (*Hansard*, October 13, 1943.)

COLLIERY DIVIDENDS

			Rate of dividend in ordinary shares	
			Average 5 years 1934-38	Average 5 years 1938-43
Bolsover Colliery	..	..	9.8	14.5
William Baird	..	..	9	15.2
Butterley Co.	..	..	6.5* (6 yrs.)	10.625* (4 yrs.)
Carlton Main	..	..	4.3	9.2
Horden Collieries	..	..	7.5	8
Lothian Coal	..	..	7*	10*
Ocean Coal & Wilson's	..	..	2.1	4.1
Partridge Jones	..	..	3.7	4.25
Powell Duffryn	..	..	6.6	6.7
Pease & Partners	..	..	3	9.7
Sheepbridge Coal & Iron	..	..	8.7* (2 yrs.)	12*
Yorkshire Amal. Collieries	..	..	3.3	6.6
Dorman Long	..	..	3.2	7
Wigan Coal Corp.	..	..	.5	2.625 (4 yrs.)
S. Hetton Coal	..	..	1.7	5
Snayd Collieries	..	..	14.5	16
Coltress Iron	..	..	17.46	19.98

* Tax Free

Assured of good profits, one and all, during the war period, however inefficient they may be, the owners are using every effort to consolidate their position for post-war. This means a conscious, deliberate campaign to upset control, at the same time as they are already laying their plans for a tighter post-war monopoly. It is significant that one of the coalowners' representatives on the national Coal Board, Mr. A. K. McCosh, has just come out with a pamphlet (distributed by the notorious Economic League) attacking nationalisation. (*The Case Against Nationalisation and the Mines.*)

The coalowners' press is openly hostile to control:

"There can be no doubt that we have dabbled more deeply in control than our Transatlantic cousins, and that the difference accounts in large measure for our lessened ability to meet the full requirements of the nation." (*Colliery Guardian*, 17.12.43.)

This attitude by the owners is the basic reason why the men

have difficulty in making the production committees work. The local manager may be sincerely anxious to make the committee a real aid to increased output, but at best he is only "one cog in the big machine"—and a machine that is certainly *not* anxious to make the committees work.

Indeed, there appears to be a fear lest successful production committees should become an argument for nationalisation, since they prove the necessity for an increased say for the miners in production matters. In South Wales, for example, the Colliery Managers' Association has come out, under the owners' influence, in open warfare against the committees.

In some collieries the men's side of the pit production committee are allowed to make underground visits to inspect what is holding up production; to hold mass meetings of the workers at the pithead and in the pit itself to discuss the problems; they make suggestions which are taken up and operated—and production is transformed. But in the great majority of collieries they are denied these facilities, and most of their suggestions are either openly rebuffed or quietly pigeonholed. Requests for new machinery or new methods to get more coal are turned down on the grounds that it "wouldn't pay," "wouldn't be worthwhile financially" and so on. Here is the kind of attitude the owners are fostering:

"... Why should it be assumed the men's side of the pit production committees should be able to improve output in any way? Their training, inclinations and very job depend on their obtaining the best for their electors rather than for production." (Extract from letter in *The Times*, 1.12.43, from Mr. T. S. Charlton, immediate past-president National Association of Colliery Managers.)

Nationalisation would sweep away the manager's conflicting responsibilities to the control and to the coalowner—which at present are making control unworkable. It would end the campaign to discredit control, which does not stop at the issue of provocative pamphlets and misleadingly-presented statistics, but is having its practical effect in almost every pit and every pit production committee up and down the country. It would make the task of introducing new machinery and concentrating men in the most productive places a matter of technical surveying and proper provision for maintaining conditions and welfare, instead of what it is today, a hopeless struggle to reconcile

sectional and public interests. It would give the men on the job the chance, through the pit production committees to make their full contribution to an immediate increase in output.

For if the nationalisation of the mines was considered essential in 1919, how much more urgent has this issue become in 1944 when speedy victory over Fascism is the overriding consideration?

Only a complete change of ownership can dispel the generations of suspicion and hatred, can win the confidence of the miners and their families, and develop a new attitude towards the coal industry. Without such a change it will be impossible to get the best out of the industry and run it in the most efficient way. It will be impossible even to get enough miners to do the job. With nationalisation a great future lies before the industry once victory is won.

It will be possible through nationalisation to *plan* the full use of the coal resources, to unify the domestic and export trades and introduce thorough-going mechanisation in every coalfield to ensure that Britain produces cheap coal for the world market—cheap not because the miners' conditions are bad, but because we use the most up-to-date methods of production. The benefit to all those industries which depend on coal would be tremendous if private profit in coal were eliminated and an end made to the combines. Coal-using industries would be able to get the coal they need at more favourable prices than they do now; while for the general public, planned and modernised production of coal would result in the reduction of the wide gap between the pithead price and the price to the consumer.

Moreover, a State-organised coal industry opens up great new fields for further development, through a proper use of scientific research and technicians. Our mining engineers are second to none; all they need is a free hand to give us a new and up-to-date industry. Not only could output be enormously increased, and physical labour lightened, but, to take only one example, there is the whole field of underground gasification of coal awaiting development in this country. Gasification where conditions are suitable can result in the saving of many lives by doing away with dangerous labour and in reducing the arduous nature of coalmining, while production per worker is higher than with ordinary mining methods. But so long as the industry

is dominated by the coalowners' search for cheap labour and high profits, what chance is there of any attempts in this direction here? It is significant that although it was a Scottish scientist who first worked out the possibilities of the process, it has only developed on a productive scale in the U.S.S.R. Then there are the vast possibilities—only their fringe has so far been touched—of utilising the by-products of coal, linked up with new processes taking place in other industries. Instead of burning raw coal, wasting energy and valuable chemical constituents, industry would be organised to extract the fullest value from every hard-won ton of output.

Two further advantages which would result from nationalisation of the mines should also be mentioned. Firstly, given nationalisation and the creation of One Miners' Union, a national uniform wage basis could more easily be worked out from the existing complicated district lists, prices and standards; and this would give added strength and unity to the miners' organisations. Secondly, with a State-owned industry, an end would be put to the scandal of the colliery-owned villages, which are a disgrace to a civilised country. Ill-built, inconvenient houses, dumped on top of the pit and filled by the noxious fumes and gases from the surrounding pit heaps, are all that the coalowners have seen fit to provide for their workers. Under nationalisation it would become the nation's responsibility to rebuild on better lines.

The advantages and the urgency of nationalising the mines and organising their production in the interests of the nation have become increasingly apparent to all sections of the community. As the *Economist* puts it "if nationalisation is the price of efficiency, the price is *not* too high."

Even the coalowners feel that they are on a sinking ship, and in an effort to get "one more chance" they are seeking a new captain. It is reported in the press that they intend to bring in a new chairman of the Mining Association from outside the industry (salary £7,500 a year) to reorganise the mines by amalgamation into some 25 great combines producing the whole output. This is their alternative to nationalisation.

To agree to this would be economic suicide. Amalgamation is nothing new in the coal industry. Even before the war it was estimated by the owners that 80 per cent of the output came from

130 undertakings; while today probably over 60 per cent of the output is produced by less than 25 large companies and combines. But these amalgamations have not solved the problem; on the contrary, all that has happened is that these large combines, stretching out to absorb undertakings in allied industries, have made constantly sharper attacks on the miners while combining to raise prices to the consumer. Further amalgamations will lead only to more crises, more quotas to restrict production, more efforts to safeguard the profits of inefficiency.

Monopoly will not produce the cheap and abundant supplies of coal that are essential. The history of the iron and steel industry during the 1930's is a grim object lesson. During that time an outside chairman was introduced into the British Iron and Steel Federation, and under him the industry was transformed into "the tightest and most restrictive monopoly Britain has ever seen" (*Economist*). This was the policy that hampered our trade in peace-time by making British steel the dearest in the world, and left us to face Hitler with restricted and completely inadequate steel capacity. It would be a blow to all hope of future national prosperity if coal were to go the same way.

So perverted has the owners' outlook become that even today, when people of the most diverse views are seeking every means to secure full employment and to avoid depression and mass unemployment after the war, the coalowners' press is looking back longingly to the days when depression and mass unemployment enabled them to cut wages and victimise their workers.

"Employers, with all their bad ways, often did something to protect the community; the pool of casual workers, unjustifiable perhaps on grounds humanitarian, frequently served as a useful fly-wheel until it developed into mass unemployment, and resistance to importunate demands for higher wages helped to keep prices within reasonable limits both at home and abroad, notwithstanding that it too often resulted in disastrous trade disputes, and kept spending power at too low a level." (*Colliery Guardian*, July 16, 1943.)

This attitude is a menace not only to the war effort but to the rebuilding of a better Britain and a better world.

If, twenty-five years ago, the Government had honoured the pledge it gave, if it had carried out the nationalisation recommended by the Sankey Commission, untold hardship and

suffering would have been avoided, both in the coalfields and throughout industry. Today the miners are in perhaps the most critical and dangerous mood they have ever been in. If the Government does not want to prolong the war, endanger the lives of the fighting men and imperil the peace, it must take this step now. In the words of Lord Sankey:—

“The present position is impossible; it is neither one thing nor the other. The Government should, therefore, at once take over the mines, both the operational and the financial control.”
—(House of Lords, 28.10.43.)

WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE NOW?

By the Government

1. It must be compelled to introduce immediate legislation to nationalise the mines. In the spring of 1940, Mr. Attlee on behalf of the Government made this statement:

“It is necessary that the Government should be given complete control over persons and property, not just some persons of some particular class of the community, but of all persons, rich and poor, employer and workman, man or woman, and all property.”

This was said at a grave moment in the history of Britain: it needs to be operated now so that the speediest victory over Fascism may be achieved. The Government have conscripted young men for the mines: the time has come when the people must compel the Government to apply the same principle to the mines.

2. Introduce a fuel rationing scheme.

3. Organise large-scale production of all essential mining machinery and spare parts. Make greater endeavours to obtain and install new coal power loaders, coal cutters and conveyors in all pits where this is immediately practicable.

4. Introduce at once a comprehensive compensation scheme, based on the claims presented by the Mineworkers' Federation of Great Britain to the Royal Commission.

5. Speed 'up the building of satisfactory hostels for the new mineworkers now being trained.

By the Miners:

1. Give full support to the efforts of the Mineworkers' Federation, both nationally and in the districts—because under their leadership you have won more substantial gains than at any

time in the history of the mining industry. In this way you can protect yourselves against any form of provocation—whether from the Government, the coalowners, or from reactionary forces in your own ranks.

2. Give your full support to the Pit Production Committees. We believe there is not a pit in this country at which, if this attitude was adopted, there would not be an immediate increase in coal output—without any miner having to make increased physical efforts.

3. Press for the formation of One Miners' Union. This is of decisive importance now. It is an indispensable part of the fight for the nationalisation of the mines. The establishment of this will destroy the exploitation of district differences as they have been able to exploit them up to the present. It will be of enormous help in getting a permanent form of national wage structure for the mining industry, that can prevent one district being set against another. It will increase the authority of your leaders in all negotiations—with the Government or with the owners—because they will then be able to speak and act as one man and one union. To get this One Union for your industry you will have to exert your pressure through your District Associations, for there are vested interests in your own ranks, who, while paying lip service are in reality opposed to it.

4. Bring about a new revival of interest in the branch and lodge life of your Association. Regular, well-attended meetings of the lodges are the surest means to keep all members informed of what is taking place in the industry, to learn the real meaning of agreements made in your name, to elect those whom you think can serve you best, and to build up local leadership that can exercise real leadership over the pits under its jurisdiction.

5. Carry out constant campaigns in the coalfields to explain every aspect of the war situation, and to bring home the importance and the responsibilities of the coal industry in relation to the war.

6. Give more attention to the problems of the young miners, fighting to secure for them the best conditions and training, cultural and educational facilities of all kinds; and in every way open to you, help to make mining a career as attractive as any other skilled trade in the country. Encourage the young miners to attend the lodge meetings, so that they too can learn and be equipped with the full facts of the situation.

7. Set the example to the rest of the working class by your output, your readiness to teach others, your time-keeping, your interest and support of the work of the Pit Production Committees. You have the proudest record of any section of the Labour movement for the strength and militancy of your organisations and the part they play in the work of the Trades Union Congress and the Labour Party. You now stand in the front line of the struggle on the Home Front against all the beastly forces of Fascism and reaction. Tackle the main enemy first; strike at the heart of German Fascism, and do not let any force in Britain become your Public Enemy No. 1 until we have all helped to wipe Hitler and his gang off the face of the earth. You are the vanguard of Britain's working class; you, more than any other section, have debts to wipe out against the Fascist bandits. Let us see that they are paid a hundredfold.

To the General Public:

1. Use your political pressure to force the Government to introduce fuel rationing and to nationalise the mines. Both are measures in your own interests.

2. Back up the miners in all their demands. They are the most vital section of the nation. It is not enough to be sympathetic in times of great mining disasters. It is your duty to be sympathetic to the miners at all times. Remember the arduous character of their calling; remember that every day, in peace and in war, **THERE IS BLOOD ON THE COAL**, sorrow and bereavement in some miner's home.

3. Voice your protests against all efforts to belittle or attack the miner. Britain has enjoyed cheap coal while darkness and starvation have stalked the coalfields. It is your duty, alongside the miners, to see that this is never allowed to happen again.

4. Respond wholeheartedly to every appeal made to you for economy in using all forms of fuel and light and power. This can be made into a substantial contribution—important not only because of the present national emergency, but to prove to the miners that you appreciate what is involved in coal production.