

COAL AND STEEL

By WILLIAM GALLACHER, M.P.

NATIONALISATION of the means of production, distribution and exchange has been discarded by the Labour leaders. Something entirely different from all that was envisaged by the pioneers has to take its place—what Mr. Morrison has euphemistically referred to as mixed economy. Certain important heavy industries are to be nationalised while the general body of industries remain in private hands; the main purpose of the nationalisation of the particular industries being to supply the essential basic materials in the greatest possible quantity and at the lowest possible rate for the privately-owned sector of industry. This is nationalisation for the capitalists and not in any way for the workers.

Of course, with the mines there was a difficulty. The campaign for nationalisation of the mines had been carried on for years with the Miners' Federation and the trade union leaders in the forefront of the campaign. Thus the whole idea associated with this proposed change was that it would provide an entirely different and very much better standard of life and conditions of work for the miners. So when the mines were taken over certain long-awaited concessions had to be granted. But the vital decisive question, that of control, was preserved in such a way as would, once the first enthusiasm was over, allow of the mining industry being fitted into Morrison's so-called mixed economy, in other words, used as a means of keeping the capitalist system of society on its feet, even though it is weak at the knees and needs propping up with dollar crutches.

But the National Coal Board cannot supply cheap coal to the other industries. It is too heavily weighted with compensation payments to the former owners. It has to sell dear at home, it has to sell dear for export. Now the Americans are demanding a cut in our coal export prices. They want to use British coal against Polish coal in the countries of Western Europe. The Poles are carrying out the reconstruction of their country on the basis of socialist economy. They refuse to sell their country for "Marshall Dollars". So America is anxious to direct economic war against them. The British miner is to be used against the Polish miner. A cut in export prices for this purpose would mean a serious loss for the Coal Board. It would make the possibility of cheap coal for private industry in Britain even more remote. Yet it is just this the Government and the Coal Board are most desperately anxious to achieve. Without cheap coal British capitalism cannot hope to keep up the export drive, with a buyers' market replacing a sellers' market.

So the Minister of Fuel has his instructions from the Government. The Executive of the Labour Party and the General Council of the

(The Notes of the Month by R.P.D. will be resumed in the New Year)

Trades Union Congress, including the miners' officials on these bodies, faithfully fall into line. The Minister and the National Coal Board have announced a policy which the press presents as "get tough with the miners". But getting tough with the miners is dangerous; they may defend themselves as one man! The Labour Party Executive and the General Council go into action. A full-blast campaign is opened against the Communists. What effect could this campaign have—if successful—but to disrupt and paralyse the unions, precisely at that moment when they need the full strength of unity to resist a "get tough" policy which worsens their conditions?

So we get an unprincipled attack on Arthur Horner on the grounds that he was opposing the policy of the National Union of Mine-workers by declaring in their name solidarity with the striking miners of France. Neither Lawther nor Watson would dare for a moment to suggest that the living standards imposed on the French miners would be tolerated for a moment by the British miners. If such conditions were imposed here there would not be a British miner working in the British coalfields. But that means nothing to these exponents of the new gospel of mixed economy. They are big men now. Why should they waste their time with ordinary workers in France, even though they are miners, when they have Marshall for a pal? And not only "Comrade" Marshall, but Vandenberg, du Pont de Nemours, Morgan, Rockefeller, Hoffman, Harriman, Forrestal, and a whole lot more of them. All millionaires or multi-millionaires. Yes, sir. Mr. Lawther and Mr. Watson are going up in the world. Why don't they take their new pals up for a tour of Durham coalfields? Here you are, boys, here are your friends. These are the lads who are keeping you going. If it were not for these big dollar boys of America, there would be mass unemployment and starvation all over Britain. But, says one of the Durham miners, "you told us it was the Labour Government that was saving us from such a fate. Now you say it is the Tories—of America. Are you trying to kid us, or what?" To which Lawther and Watson would in all probability reply, "Get out, you damned red, you are as bad as Horner". But Mr. Lawther and Mr. Watson won't succeed in palming off on the miners the American millionaires as their friends. True, they have the full support of the whole capitalist press in the country, the radio and the most reactionary elements of all the religious institutions. There is only one thing wanted. They can't give the miners what the miners desire, and the "get tough policy" will never be accepted no matter how many blandishments they may try. Here from the *Daily Worker* as I write is a statement issued on Wednesday, 17th November:

The Miners' Executive decided in London yesterday, in view of the objections to the setting up of Joint Attendance Committees to deal with absenteeism, to ask all branches to report on local measures at present in operation.

They also decided to ask the Coal Board that the Joint Committee on Production should review the position.

But the Coal Board has the task of bringing down the price of coal.

This could be done by stopping payment of compensation to the former coal owners. This the Government will not tackle, for it would mean a real attack on capitalism and would require the whole force of the working-class movement, including the Communists, to carry it through. It would also mean a break with Marshall and the American millionaires. So while we have the present leadership in the Labour movement that can be ruled out. The only other way is to cut the price at the expense of the miner. Harder work and greater output without corresponding increase in living standards. This is what the General Council and the majority of the Miners' Executive hope to achieve. This is what "Comrade" Marshall wants, and what the Federation of British Industries wants. It's a great game. It has been played on the workers often enough, but never before have the trade union leaders so openly and deliberately set themselves to doing the dirty work of the capitalist class.

On the 31st Anniversary of the Russian Revolution Molotov spoke of the great advance in production in the Soviet Union. He followed this by showing that the wages of the workers, the real wages as expressed in purchasing power, had doubled since last year. That's as it should be. That makes sense. Increased production and an increased standard of living. But here it's the opposite. Increased productivity and a declining standard of living. Does that make sense? It certainly does not. And you don't have to take my word for it. Maurice Webb, Chairman of the Parliamentary Labour Party, raised this very matter at a Party meeting, and submitted a series of budgets drawn from his constituency to show the decline in purchasing power, and the real problem that was facing the housewife.

Increased production. We're getting it, but where is the surplus going? Not to the workers. No! Part of it is going to pile up armaments for America's war against the Soviet Union—against Socialism in Europe. What a despicable rôle for a Labour Government. To spend the nation's resources in preparation for a war from which only the multi-millionaires of America can hope to gain an advantage. For a war such as is contemplated can mean nothing other than complete disaster for this country. Yet that is where part of the increased production is going, to forward America's war plans—and the rest? Believe it or not, brother, it's going into the pockets of these same American multi-millionaires, who are so anxious, according to Lawther and Watson, to help us out of our difficulties. How did they come to believe such hokum?

But the bulk of the increased production, from industry as a whole, goes to export in order to cover the adverse balance created by the fact that we are dependent on America for a disproportionate amount of her goods, while America does not take anything like a similar quantity of our goods. But the goods we get from America are all at inflated prices. Truman removed controls towards the end of 1946 and prices in America went soaring. We have to put huge profits

into the pockets of the American capitalists. That is why we have the almost unbelievable contradiction of increased productivity with a declining standard of living. That's why we have the Marshall Plan. A plan to keep us tied to America and to toil and sweat to feed the American war machine and swell American profits. That is why there is a demand for a "get tough policy" with the miners, that is why there is such a ferocious slander campaign against the Communist Party.

But the workers will never be taken in by such a fraudulent policy. The strike of the Ayrshire miners and the growing unrest throughout the coalfields should be a warning to those who think they can cash in on American Dollars.

So much for coal. What of steel? If ever there was a sham fight it was during the discussion on the Steel Bill. Forty years ago one of the most popular pamphlets at socialist meetings was "Liberal and Tory Hypocrisy". It is time a new chapter was added to it. Consider. During the war the Coalition Government, in the case of several firms where production was not up to standard, took over the shares of the companies and appointed directors to take charge of the business. The firm of Shorts was a case in point. But nobody ever dreamed of suggesting that such a procedure had anything to do with nationalisation. Yet that is all that is happening with steel. The shareholders get bonds in place of their shares. One piece of paper in exchange for another. All the separate boards of directors remain. The structure of the industry is unaltered. The relations between directors and workers, between the industry and the Trade Unions remain as they were. No change of any kind. Not once in any speech by Government spokesmen was there even a suggestion that the workers in the industry would benefit in any way from the change, or that the measure was prompted by concern for the working class. Having taken over the shares, the Government now becomes responsible for spending somewhere about £200 million to bring the industry up to a measurable standard of efficiency. Once that has been done, the bonds can be retrieved and the shares handed back again. In fact, Mr. Morrison, a master of banalities and trivialities, after the most pretentious and nonsensical claims for the Bill, informed Eden who (on a point arising out of something said by Cripps) demanded an answer to the question, would the Conservatives have the right to repeal the Bill, that this course would be quite in order. I quote *Hansard*, Wednesday, 17th November, column 483:

My answer is that, clearly, it would be constitutionally perfectly legitimate for that to be done.

He should have added "We have made it perfectly simple for you to do so. We give them bonds and take their shares, you give them shares and take their bonds". The bonds will be valued at £1 10s for every £1 preference share, £2 6s 8d on the average for every £1 of ordinary stock. So says Sir Stafford Cripps to the Tories in the House of Commons, or as he further put it, £243 million in respect of

£134,500,000 of paid-up capital. And this is the bloke who tells the workers, "Don't think of material things, think of spiritual things".

Strauss, Minister of Supply, was anxious to get the Tories to understand that the idea of the move was to secure our Defence programme, to strengthen the gearing up of the American war machine. Strauss is reputed to be a very wealthy man, in his own right. In his reckoning the workers do not appear prominently in the picture, except in so far as they could be induced to work even harder than in the past several years.

What was generally recognised to be the most knowledgeable, clearest and effective speech was made by Sir Andrew Duncan, the spokesman of the Steel Federation. In that speech he made it evident beyond any doubt that there were no serious differences between the steel barons and the Government. They understand what is happening and how easy it will be to bring about readjustments. The whole miserable business is a policy designed to keep decrepit capitalism going at the expense of the people who must continue on short rations, without the slightest hope of betterment. Cripps, in the rôle of the Anti-Communist Holy Inquisitor, held up the fearsome "bogy". "Social Democracy is the true barrier against Communism", he declared. The enemy for him, as for Deakin, Lawther and Watson, is no longer capitalism or the capitalist class. The enemy is Gallacher, Pollitt, and those with whom they are associated—the politically active workers.

Mr. Mackay, a wealthy Labour gent, who exudes importance, who with Churchill carries the burden of responsibility not only for Britain, but for Western Europe also, put the matter very bluntly and very crudely. "The conflict in Europe," he said, "is not between capitalism and anything else, because capitalism is dead and finished". (How many pound shares have you got in the corpse, Mr. Mackay?) "That is an 18th century conception. The conflict is between Social Democracy and Communism." Loud cheers from the American multimillionaires, who are "dead and finished".

But there, in the cheap and trashy twaddle of this wealthy and conceited person, you get the whole sorry bag of tricks. Deceive the workers and slander the Communists. Gear up the war machine and crawl in meek subservience before the corrupt and corrupting Dollar God of America. Such a policy can solve no problems for the people of this country. It can only bring upon us ruin and disaster. Yet it is for such a policy that Labour and Trade Union leaders try to shackle the working class. But the shackle will not hold. The workers know that capitalism is not dead, they know that the profit-mongers are as rapacious as they ever were. Nor will the Communists be deterred by lies and slanders. Strengthened and supported by the politically active workers, the Communist Party will carry high and proud the banner of working-class emancipation, the banner of peace and progress—the banner which the agents of Dollar Imperialism are trying to bury in the quagmire of "mixed economy".