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CABINET.

**COAL MINING INDUSTRY.
NATIONAL UNION OF MINeworkERS.**

MEMORANDUM BY THE MINISTER OF FUEL AND POWER.

I think it my duty to inform my colleagues of certain submissions recently made to me by the National Union of Mineworkers and to call attention to the implications thereof.

Since the present Government took office and announced in the King's Speech its intention to nationalise the coalmining industry I have been mainly concerned (apart from the preparation of the Nationalisation Bill) with two immediate problems, the production of more coal and the recruitment necessary to maintain adequate man-power in the industry in future years. On both these problems I have sought the co-operation of the National Union of Mineworkers. On the first I have pointed out that the Government can reasonably expect a great effort on the part of the National Union of Mineworkers and the miners to produce more coal to meet current needs in support of the policy of nationalisation. On the second I have urged the necessity for stressing the improved position of the industry under the existing Wage Agreement and the new prospects offered by nationalisation as regards security and general conditions so as to encourage boys and young men to enter the industry.

The National Union of Mineworkers from the outset promised collaboration in increasing production and set up an organisation under Mr. Horner for this purpose. They also undertook to deal with absenteeism through the Lodges following my decision to discontinue prosecutions. Their efforts have met with some success in certain districts and lodges, but are far from having been universally successful either in increasing production or in dealing with absenteeism. As regards recruitment, certain miners' leaders have found it difficult to discontinue old habits of disparaging the industry in the mind of the public and young people by dwelling on the arduous and dangerous nature of coalmining and the unwillingness of miners' sons to enter it.

There has also been pressure from certain leaders of the National Union of Mineworkers for the immediate introduction of a 5-day week, earlier ending of the Saturday shift, a fortnight's holiday (instead of the present week's holiday) with pay, higher rates of compensation for accidents or death. Some of these proposals, e.g., 5-day week, require careful examination from the point of view of their effect upon the output of coal (this is now being examined in my Department) and of their repercussions on other industries. I have made it clear that I am not opposed in principle to the proposals put forward. I have, however, pointed out that both the National Union of Mineworkers and the Labour Party have always taken the view that the best conditions could not be provided for the miners under private ownership and could only be achieved as a result of nationalisation. Accordingly, I have urged that except in so far as they can be dealt with under the existing conciliation machinery of the industry and the existing Wages Agreement which runs till 1948, they must await the results which we hope to achieve from nationalisation.

At a meeting which I had with the Executive of the National Union of Mineworkers on the 18th December, a number of the Members of the Executive took the line that they would find it increasingly difficult to deal with absenteeism

and to continue the campaign for increased production and the encouragement of recruitment to the industry unless some of their proposals were accepted at once. They indicated that they were doubtful whether, in the absence of a prospect of some concessions in the near future, production would recover after the Christmas holidays. Some of them also raised the question of wages. Hitherto it had been generally accepted that the existing wage structure would continue to be governed by the Wages Agreement of 1944 which runs until 1948, but certain Members of the Executive argued that recent increases in wages and other concessions given to railwaymen, dockers, &c., had disturbed the relationship previously existing between the wages and conditions of miners and those in other industries. They said that the increased wages or holidays in these other industries had been brought about as the result of strikes or threats of strikes and that this had been noted by the miners who had hitherto not taken advantage of the national need for coal to press their claims.

The implication of what was said at the meeting on the 18th December is that having regard to what has happened in other industries, we cannot assume that the introduction of the Coal Nationalisation Bill and the prospect of nationalisation will prevent claims being put forward, especially on such matters as increased holidays with pay, and perhaps on wages, regardless of the additional burden that might thereby be imposed upon the National Coal Board. These are, of course, matters which fall to be dealt with at present by the ordinary conciliation machinery of the industry and, under the present Wages Agreement, in the last resort by arbitration, but I think my colleagues should be aware that these matters may be put forward and pressed at a time when the Coal Nationalisation Bill will be passing through Parliament, and that such action may prejudice the production of coal before the winter is over, and also prejudice the already critical recruitment position, and therefore next year's coal budget prospects.

I need hardly say that I shall do everything within my power to prevent any action that is calculated to impede production or jeopardise the activities of the proposed National Coal Board.

E. S.

*Ministry of Fuel and Power, S.W. 1,
27th December, 1945.*

