

COAL IS A BATTLEFIELD IN BRITAIN

Influence of a Play

By S. H. F.

Every major coalfield in Britain was represented at the World Assembly for Moral Re-armament held at Caux, in Switzerland, during the autumn. There were miners straight from the coal face, managers of pits producing as much as a million tons of coal a year, trade union officials, and representatives of the National Coal Board from different areas.

They gave vivid pictures of the War of Ideas that is being fought out in the British Coal Industry. It is no exaggeration to say that on the issue of the battles in this war depends the success or failure of the reconstruction programme in Britain. A branch secretary of the National Union of Mineworkers from a Scottish colliery said, "Lanarkshire is better known as 'Little Moscow' in Scotland, and I used to claim some credit for the name. In 1945, due to frequent stoppages caused by Communist and atheist elements, our colliery was closed down."

But management must accept a share of the blame for the bitterness of the class struggle. Typical of the attitude of many managers in the coal industry was that of George Sanders from one of the biggest pits in the Midlands. He said at the Caux conference: "I used to curse men to get coal. I felt that it was only a case of the battle of the strongest and pursued a ruthless policy. I just drove the men on every occasion I could. Now I have realised that it is people like me who cause the Communist tendencies that you hear so much about."

GROWTH OF A NEW SPIRIT

These two men are now part of the growing force of workers and managers who are fighting to bring a new spirit of teamwork into the British coal industry. Nationalisation has not cured the accumulated resentment caused by the conditions of the last 100 years.

Managers and miners who had been at Caux in 1946 spoke of the

effect of bringing the new spirit of teamwork into their areas. A branch secretary of the National Union of Mineworkers from the Midlands said: "Moral Re-armament is the answer to our problems. I have worked underground for 32 years. Before Moral Re-armament came to our pit we had never once hit our production target. Afterwards we have beaten that target every week, and the Coal Board, in co-operation with the miners, has now raised our target. The under-manager and I had not agreed in 15 years. It was said that he would rather meet the devil than come to see me at the coal face. Now all that is changed. He is different. I am, too. We have teamwork together."

In the Victoria Pit, near Stoke, the production target was raised from 8,000 tons weekly to 9,000, and then to 10,000. This target has now been exceeded 19 times, and a few weeks ago the total was an all-time record of 11,075 tons.

Speaking at a labour management conference in the Midlands at the end of November, 1947, Mr. Harold Lockett, president of the 20,000 N. Staffordshire miners, said: "If every other district in Britain raised as much coal as our miners are doing, we should hit our national target and have enough for export." This is a striking statement in view of the fact that North Staffordshire is not an easy coalfield. Many of the seams in that area are narrow and sloping.

"THE FORGOTTEN FACTOR"

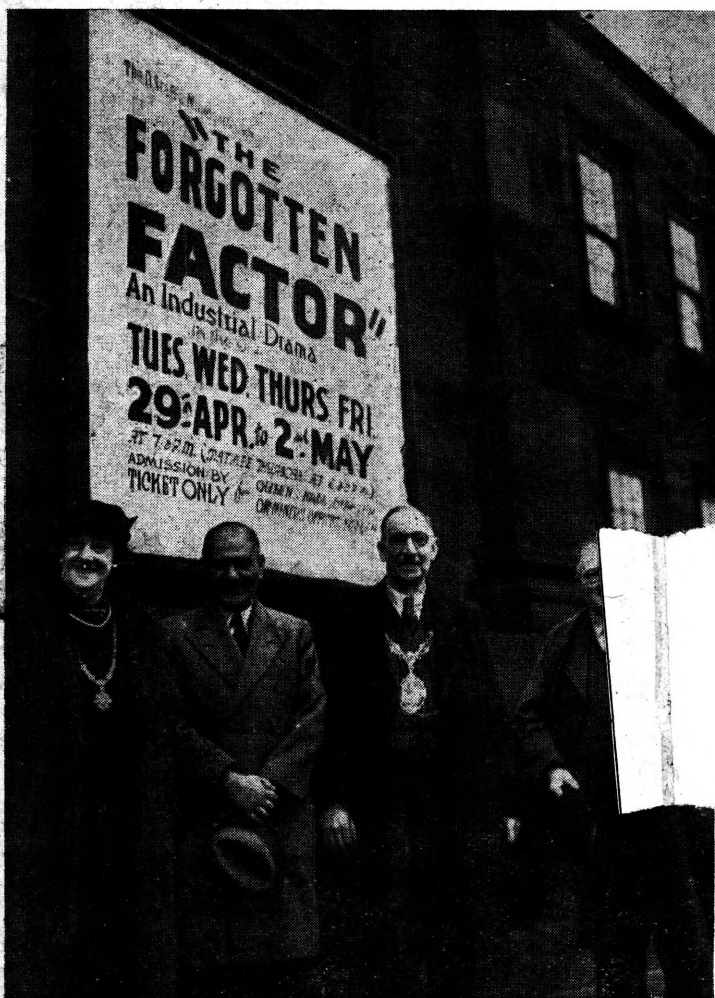
A powerful influence in creating the new spirit has been the Moral Re-armament play, "The Forgotten Factor." Before coming to England, this dramatic presentation of the secret of industrial teamwork was shown at the National Theatre, Washington, on the invitation of President Truman, and toured through the principal industrial cities of the United States. In London "The Forgotten Factor" played to packed houses for 8½ months at the Westminster Theatre and was seen by representatives of the coal industry from all parts of Britain. Many thousands of miners and their wives saw this play in North Staffordshire in May just before the introduction of the 5-day week, and more than 150 requests have been made for it to visit other coalfields.

TEAMWORK OR CLASS STRUGGLE

"The Forgotten Factor" is now touring the coalfields in the Midlands, and the effect of the play was recently summed up by a miner under the following four points: "Production goes up, absenteeism goes down, we have teamwork and the answer to strikes, and a new leadership is developed to outpace the subversive forces."

But the war of ideas and the battle for control of the hearts and minds of 700,000 miners still goes on. Quite recently Mr. Arthur Horner, the Secretary of the National Union of Mineworkers, who is also a member of the Executive of the Communist Party, made a speech in the Midlands denouncing Moral Re-armament. It seems to have had little effect in that area, as on the following evening the theatre in Stoke was packed with miners standing 6-10 deep at the back to see "The Forgotten Factor."

The battle for British coal affects more countries than Britain. The Prime Minister of Denmark and leading industrialists from Norway, Sweden and France who attended the Caux conference spoke of the desperate difficulties in their countries as a result of the failure of the British coal industry to supply the coal that they had relied on for so many years. It is a vicious circle. For lack of British coal Denmark cannot export food that is urgently needed, and, for the same reason, Sweden has to burn the wood that Britain must have to complete her housing programme. Even here in Africa there are many shortages that would not exist but for the decreased production of British coal compared to the years before the war. Coal is a battlefield that is watched with the same breathless interest as El Alamein or Normandy.



The Lord Mayor and Lady Mayoress of Stoke-on-Trent, with Mr. Harold Lockett, President of the North Staffordshire Area of the National Union of Mineworkers.