

OUR MINING POLICY

By R. W. Postgate

AN address to the rank and file of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain has now been agreed upon by the Executive of the C.P. and will shortly be available in pamphlet form at the price of 1d. For technical reasons it has proved impossible to print it in full in the columns of THE COMMUNIST. It is very important in view of the present circumstances. The Miners' Federation is, at the moment, suffering from a rapid, almost a consumptive decline. Its rank and file are deserting it. It is no longer the ordinary rot that sets in after a defeat. The usual stampede of weak-kneed and weak-minded members who never really desired to be in the union at all, has been overpassed. Members of long standing and enthusiastic rebels are both alike beginning to refuse contributions. Separate unions are being formed. The fantastic "Scottish National Trade Union Association," formed under the employers' patronage, has been followed by the new Stoneyburn colliery union, formed by Left wing elements. At the same time enginemen and others are breaking away into craft unions. Discouragement, bankruptcy, chaos. Such is the present position in the mining fields. What should be the policy of the Left wing elements? What is the policy of the Communist Party? Smash the M.F.G.B.? Rebuild it? Form a new local union?

The manifesto of the E.C. contains the answers, in general terms, to these questions. In this article I am proposing to summarise these answers, and to draw out certain of their particular implications.

It is first agreed that craft unionism is not to be tolerated. The efforts of the

Left wing elements in the coalfields should be turned to exterminating the various craft unions of enginemen, surfacemen, and all the rest. Our objective is one industrial union—a British *National Miners Union*, as has been consistently urged in the columns of this paper and particularly in its Industrial Notes. The attitude of the Communists must therefore be to drive the craftsmen back to the general mass of their fellow-workers.

Does this mean back to the M.F.G.B.? If so, are we committed to a general support of the M.F.G.B.?

Yes.

The Executive of the Communist Party answers in the negative the questions "Is the Federation dying?" "Are we to assist in killing it?" Let it be observed that this policy *does not exclude* the setting up of new local organisations where the county associations, or lesser bodies, have fallen into ruins, or where it is for other reasons expedient to break away. Whether it is best to form a new union or recast the old depends on local conditions. But always and everywhere these new unions should remain within the Federation and provision should be made for their future incorporation within a Miners' National Union, to the establishment of which their policy should be exclusively directed.

Consider the alternative in concrete terms. Let us suppose that in Fife (as has been asserted by some presumably well-informed correspondents) the Left wing elements have it in their power to carry over the whole county into a new Red industrial union. Let them do so, it is all to the good. It is far better

than forming separate discordant unions in every Fifeshire village.

But what is to be the policy of this new union, or reformed old union? Is it to achieve a national union by attempting to spread from county to county and so transform itself into a National Union, ignoring the Federation? This may seem charming enough in theory, but in fact would work out quite differently. It would give the Hodges crowd a new lease of life. It may be quite possible for the Left wing to gain control of the Fife coalfield now. It is quite impossible for them to do anything in Kent or the Forest of Dean. They might perhaps bring South Wales into the new Union: they would certainly meet with a blank refusal in Northumberland. Thus the mining industry will be split from head to foot, through and through, on political lines. In some coalfields would be a "red" union, willing to act but crippled by the hostility and probable blacklegging of the others: in the rest the old gang would reign still, voting every year till eternity a further increase of £150 in Mr. Hodges' salary.

For this reason, and others, we cannot go right out to kill the weakened Federation. Even if it has but 500 or 250 thousand of its one-time 900,000 members, it is yet a considerable body, and one which cannot rightly be described as "dead" or non-existent. We have to tackle the matter at the root—the county associations. We have to use them as a basis from which to turn the M.F.G.B. into a real union, which it has never been. And the first step towards this is the expulsion of all the existing leaders who in any way share responsibility for the recent disaster.