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THE COAL STRIKE

As this is written, the paralysis resulting from the coal strike is reaching the Nation's Capital and may produce action. Countless remedies have been suggested, ranging from the indictment of John L. Lewis to the seizure of the mines. Serious as the problem is, it calls for sober and realistic treatment. That means a careful diagnosis to find a workable remedy. The first and foremost objective is to resume coal production and stop the mounting damage and loss.

THE FACTS

The whole story is not always easy to get. But let's start with this obvious truth. Before a dispute can be settled, the parties to the dispute must be willing to continue discussions until agreement is reached. Therein lies the difficulty. Since the very first conference on March 12th, Operators and Union Officials have not actually bargained over their customary differences because of two obstacles. It appears that Union officials have in a general way insisted that Operators agree in principle on two things before bargaining could take place. The first is a royalty on each ton of coal, estimated at \$50,000,000 per year to be paid into a fund and administered exclusively by the Union for health and welfare purposes. The second is a general demand that company employees such as foremen and supervisors join the regular union. The first of these two demands has received most emphasis in the discussions centering around the strike. With these two general demands standing in the way, there has been no bargaining on the normal issues such as wages, hours, safety and working conditions. Here then is a stalemate which must be resolved if coal is to be produced.

WHAT REMEDY

Seizure of the mines has been repeatedly suggested. It is clear that under existing emergency powers, the President can seize the mines and appeal to miners to resume work. To the miner, this offers a dilemma. Much as he might wish to resume work, he would be subject to expulsion from the union. And in addition, the basic problem would still remain. Since the present strike was legal under existing law, no legislation enacted by Congress can make it illegal. The essential problem is to bring about coal production at the earliest date by securing a resumption of bargaining between the parties on the issues involved. That in turn requires the elimination of the obstacles which stand in the way of a resumption of bargaining on the usual issues.

A REMEDY.

On one of these obstacles, the House of Representatives has already acted, namely the unionizing of company personnel. Section 12 of the so-called "Case Bill" which passed the House on February 7th, denies to all supervisory employees the regular status of "employees" under certain sections of the Wagner Labor Relations Act. In other words supervisory employees could not be included in the rank and file union for bargaining purposes. Since the parties to the dispute have concluded no agreement with respect to such employees, enactment of the Case Bill would dispose of that issue by law. With respect to the royalty or tonnage tax, legislation is in preparation to deal with this issue. If it were removed from dispute by law, bargaining could then be resumed on the remaining issues such as wages and hours and working conditions. Such a proposal could be attached to the pending Case Bill. It would seem that Congress can properly define the legitimate objects for collective bargaining. But the Case Bill- passed 90 days ago by the House- has had no action by the Senate. And there's the rub. Competent and well-informed persons may disagree with this approach. But it appears reasonable and offers a prospect for quick action. To initiate new legislation would require action by both House and Senate and would doubtless require considerable time. Quickest action could be had by using the Case Bill as a vehicle for this purpose. NOTE - As this is written there is reason to believe that Senator Knowland of California will move consideration of the Case Bill on Friday, May 10.