

Whose Chickens?

* IT IS AS foolish to blame John L. Lewis for the recurring crises in the coal industry as to blame the President; as futile to censure the miners as the public at large.

John L. Lewis has been described as lusting for power, a man who has not hesitated to use his labor organization to further his own personal ambitions and to feather his nest, to say nothing of the nests of other members of his family, and who finally has dared to defy the very power and authority of the United States Government itself, and that in a time of national crisis.

All of which is true.

It is also said that John L. Lewis has waged a life-long fight in behalf of one of the most cruelly exploited and depressed of all labor groups; that he has secured concessions for the members of that group in the face of almost insurmountable obstacles by the exercise of generalship of the very highest order, coupled with adamant persistence. It is claimed that no challenge of personal dishonesty has ever been sustained against him, that his individual emoluments have been insignificant as compared with the huge sums that many so-called captains of industry have extorted through monopoly in one form or another, and that if he is driven by ambition for place and power that is only what has possessed practically every occupant and aspirant for the White House since the founding of our republic; and finally that he has exhibited courage almost beyond words in daring to risk the wrath of the American people by what they might well view as an attempt to hamstring the nation's war effort but which he, without doubt, considers only the performance of duty in the fight to protect his underprivileged followers.

All of which is likewise true.

Many will assert that the President and leaders of the Democratic Party were guilty of a low order of political trading when they accepted contributions of hundreds of thousands of dollars from the mine workers, that the Administration has been brazenly partial to organized labor in hundreds of disputes, and that the periodic walkouts of the coal miners, instead of indicating any change in that policy of favoritism, are merely the out-

growth of the personal animosity that has developed between Lewis and the President.

That, too, is true.

In the final analysis it is economic ignorance that is to blame, and of economic ignorance all parties to the dispute, including the public—indeed, *especially* the public—are guilty. By his own speeches and actions, John L. Lewis believes that the machine is an evil, that wages are drawn from capital, and that the Malthusian doctrine that population tends to outrun subsistence is completely true.

By all the evidence at hand the President subscribes to the same beliefs. No president in our history has shown greater concern for "the poor people who have to work"; none has shown more bungling ineptitude in the effort to help them. The miners don't merely believe, they KNOW that their work is hard, dangerous and underpaid. But they believe their only means of relief is to squeeze wage increases out of the operators.

The operators can show that they have had more unprofitable than profitable years, and that taxes, operating costs other than wages, and price ceilings are such as to make it impossible for them to grant further wage increases.

The President, properly pointing out that the coal miners, too, are loyal citizens, is right in declaring that a stoppage in coal production is a threat to our very national existence.

And the public, uncertain, confused, fearful, not knowing what to believe, or where to place the responsibility, much less what caused the trouble, is itself most of all to blame for its colossal ignorance and stupidity. If it is true that the current rash of strikes, in the face of organized labor's no-strike pledge, is merely the Roosevelt chickens coming home to roost, it is much more true that not only the strikes but all the intolerable mess into which the bureaucratic management on the home front has succeeded in involving itself, is the public's chickens coming home to roost—just retribution visited on the people for their pigheaded resistance to learning a few fundamental truths about taxes, land rent, tariffs and the right to produce.

—C. O. STEELE