

UMWA Banner Is Emblem Of Life, Dignity And Justice, Says Owens

John Owens, International Secretary-Treasurer of the United Mine Workers of America, delivered the following address at the 50th Anniversary Dinner of District 1, UMWA, in Masonic Temple, Scranton, Saturday, October 29. Space limitations prohibited its appearance in last week's issue of the NEWS in which was carried the verbatim texts of President John L. Lewis' and Vice-President Thomas Kennedy's talk. Owens' address follows:

Distinguished clergymen, the honorable mayor, the district presidents, all the executive officers of the districts, as well as the officers of the local unions, and members of our organization—

We've had a very unusual day.

This is John Mitchell day. It is not a birthday of a hero or the anniversary of a battle or the crowning of a king or the founding of a nation. It is a day when the anthracite citizens and miners by outward manifestation recognize the work of the coal miners—when coal miners, as coal miners, feel their power and glory in it. It is a day when from one end of the anthracite region to the other, hundreds of thousands of citizens have paid tribute to that vast army that followed the banner of the United Mine Workers of America.

One of the most potent factors in building up and making great and strong this formation, is the day when by our actions we teach our children that coal mining is honorable and that only through their union can the coal miners hope to receive some of the beneficent ends for which society is established and government founded.

Such is John Mitchell day today. Such has been John Mitchell days always.

It is a proud privilege for me to participate in commemorating fifty years of the ability of coal miners to work together in building a strong, prosperous union and community, patterned within the design of the American way of life. I am glad that I am a member of this union tonight, as always.

I am proud, as you are, to boast that I am a member of an organization that retains the old fundamental concept of unionism, that is populated by people who are willing to shoulder the responsibilities of life—an organization of men who are alert and willing to do for themselves the things that are plainly necessary to improve their living standards, so as to enable them to hand on to their offspring a better opportunity to face the problems of life that the pioneers who founded this union, faced.

The anthracite miners exemplify a people unafraid of work to win the hard battle of fostering the difficult economic realities of life. There are many more regions like this in Pennsylvania. There are hundreds scattered throughout the nation, where the people who comprise the communities have demonstrated the courage and willingness to work and to do for themselves the things that are necessary without asking alms from political parties.

It is this segment of our population that constitutes the background of America.

We are a practical people. The political history of the United Mine Workers of America is a complete repudiation of our acceptance of any doctrine that calls for us to trade in our freedom as a short cut on the panacea



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route to a socialized and regimented utopia.

The members of the United Mine Workers of America have freedom of worship and freedom of thought, which are essential to the exercise of free speech, the casting of a free ballot—the very freedom that our entire democracy revolves on and without which our way of life, as you and I know it, cannot survive for long.

John Mitchell is not dead. As the clergy will say, and we believe "There is no death!"

"There is no death. The leaves may fall.

The flowers may fade and pass away.

They only wait through summer hours

The coming of the May.

There is no death.

John Mitchell went down to rise Upon some fair shores. And bright His heaven-jewelled crown. John Mitchell—

John Mitchell will live forevermore."

It is with a feeling of pride, brought to your attention by the chairman, that we have had as president of this organization, nine men, all of them in their time and in their day met the problems as confronted them the best they knew how. No doubt the problems were met with different methods, and different methods to surmount obstacles were followed that perhaps we think are obsolete and inoperative in the year 1949. But yet in all honor to those eight that have gone on to their reward, they did the best they could, but it was left in my lifetime and yours to have at the head of the United Mine Workers of America, the greatest labor leader that ever led a labor organization in this or any other country.

He is a kind and loving father. He's a labor statesman. He's a great American. And he has more dignity and courage and sympathy for the plain citizen of America and the world than any other American that I have ever come in contact with.

He has been responsible for elevating the standards of the mining communities all over America. He has been responsible for bringing higher wages, shorter hours and better working conditions, not only for those who go down into the bowels of the earth, but he has been responsible for bringing these conditions to the attention of the American people and instilling enough courage in the men and women who are employed in these industries in America, to stand up and fight and fight until he has built up,

physically and mentally and morally, almost every man and woman who is required to work for a livelihood in America.

So I say, it is with a feeling of pride that we are gathered here tonight, recognizing the impact of the United Mine Workers of America on the social, economic and political development in this region.

In the field of labor, the United Mine Workers of America occupies a position of unquestioned leadership. We have been the spearhead in the establishment of collective bargaining in our industrial life. Our principles and policies, strength and unity, and our outstanding leadership has been an inspiration to the millions of men and women who toil for a living.

The voice of our organization is heard in the legislative halls of America. Through our leaders we have ever insisted and demanded that the voice of the American workman be heard in a determination of public policy affecting the well-being and the welfare of all Americans. As a responsible American institution, the United Mine Workers of America have at all times defended the ideals and the institutions that constitute America's liberty and America's democracy.

Words are inadequate to describe the many benefits that have come to our people and others, through the unceasing activity of our organization. A more decent standard of living has been achieved. As I said, wages have been increased—the hours in the day and the week have been substantially reduced, while working conditions have been improved.

Those dark, damp Siberias of the coal country and steel country have been transformed into American communities where civil liberties now prevail.

New energy has been released. New hope has been instilled in human hearts.

Your organization is a great reservoir of power, restraint in its use of that power, for a sensible, sober support of a rational economic order.

These accomplishments have not come to us without a struggle. They weren't obtained in a day, a week or a year. They are the result of a fine determination embedded in the minds and hearts of the coal miners of America to maintain a strong, enduring union.

Our union today is the product of the sweat and blood of men with vision, courage and faith.

What love is to the heart, what light is to the eyes, what liberty is to the soul, the United Mine Workers of America has become to the coal miners in this country.

Therefore it devolves upon us to preserve the gains already made and to hand on to our successors in the coal mines of America, a strengthened and enlarged union.

This you can do. And, I am sure, this you will do.

Let us all resolve on this golden anniversary of District 1 to hold up the banner of the United Mine Workers of America. It's an emblem of life and dignity and justice. It's death to oppression, tyranny and injustice. Long may the banner of the United Mine Workers of America endure. God make its righteous principles to expand until it enwraps every non-union coal mine in America—until peace, safety and true political freedom is brought to the down-trodden, the ignorant and the oppressed, the white and the black in every coal mine in America.