

PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS

MR. W. E. JONES (Vice-President): It gives me the greatest possible pleasure to ask Sir William, the President of this organisation, to give us his Presidential Address.

SIR WILLIAM LAWTHOR (President): Fellow members, My first duty is to welcome you to this Conference—the eighth since the National Union was formed; and I shall remind you in a moment of the tremendous distance we have travelled since we last met in this queen of watering-places.

But before doing so I want to make a special record of the passing of some who were with us when we met last year at Blackpool. No representative took a more active part in the affairs of this Union than Alf Davies. President of the South Wales Area and a member of the National Executive Committee, he displayed in his last few years, even when he was labouring under terrific physical disabilities, those qualities that endeared him to all who knew him. His loss to his fellows will be difficult to estimate. There is also the loss of one of our oldest and most faithful servants, Percy Pickard, who was in the service of the miners from the beginning of his life until he passed beyond. For years at these annual conferences, he took a verbatim report of the proceedings, and those, together with his work in the Yorkshire offices, will be his monument to future generations of miners. Percy Pickard was the worthy son of a great leader of men, Ben Pickard. Also from Yorkshire was our great friend and helper, Frank Collindridge, who was a member of the National Executive Committee for many years, and who was a Member of

Parliament, and served our interests for so long, and with such a high sense of duty. And lastly, the miners and the Labour Movement mourn the passing of Sir Stafford Cripps. We will never forget the work he did at Gresford. Without any payment, and, simply for the love of his fellow men, he spent weeks in drawing the attention of the nation to the price the miners pay in winning coal, to give their fellows heat and light. We will never forget this brave, courageous man, who lived and died for the cause of the people he loved more than life itself.

I ask you to stand in their memory, and in the memory of all those of our members who have passed since we last met. Since you began to assemble for this Conference, we have had another grim reminder—two, in fact—at Port-of-Ayre in North Wales, and at Manor Powis in Stirling, of the price that is ever paid by your fellows in the getting of coal.

(Delegates stood in silence.)

Our first consideration in our work must always be the safety aspect. These words should be quite unnecessary; but in this, the twentieth century, which has just commenced its second half, the number who have been killed in this industry is fifty-two thousand three hundred and forty-six, an average of one thousand men and boys each year. That army of men and boys, some of the latter of very tender years, together with the hundreds injured by accident, or stricken with industrial disease, should be the lever for an awakening in our ranks of a really intensive drive as never before for more and more safety measures. Of what value are wages or any material changes in our conditions, if life to enjoy them is denied to the miner? Your National Executive Committee will place proposals before you to help to bring an ever-increasing safety consciousness to this coalfield. The evidence given at some recent disasters, of the sheer neglect in safeguarding life, staggers me, when I realise the stage that science and education have reached today. We ourselves would be equally as guilty if we hesitated to advocate and enforce further improvements. We have it within our own power to step away from the traditions of the past. Some of those improvements will need new legislation and perhaps this week we can make this appeal to ask Parliament to give increased hope and confidence to this industry, by setting aside some of its time to bring in measures that would find agreement amongst all engaged in coalmining, in whatever position they function. We know of the steps that have been, and are being taken at the Ministry of Fuel and Power, to institute regulations to supersede the old Acts that are on the Statute Book. But it could have been the golden opportunity for those who are for ever uttering high-faluting platitudes on Parliament being of national, rather than Party interests, to have thought of these things. Changes have to be undertaken in legislation that will point the way to the rest of the world, and this, the industry upon which Britain depends, must change its fashions in legislation, as in other spheres. It ought never to be forgotten by non-mining families that there is a terrible death roll in this, their industry, but without its success none of us can live as a great nation. For far too often you yourselves neglect to accept suggested changes that would help to a higher safety standard. That evil, too, must be fought. Safety must be the first and last consideration.

When we last met at Scarborough in 1936, there were resolutions on that

Agenda, seeking changes that appeared, according to the Press of that day, as being highly desirable, but Utopian. Let me recall some of them, in order that those who know not of the progress that has been made, may awaken from their slumbers or, shall we say their lack of understanding of the march of history. We had a resolution on the Means Test, that soul-destroying weapon the Tory Government of the day used, and would do so again. We were asking that the Welfare Levy should be restored from a halfpenny to a penny per ton. Contrast the amount that is spent in that direction today. On June 30th this year, the Miners' Welfare Commission came to an end. It has had a most useful life of 32 years. Those of us whose minds go back to the days before the Welfare Levy will be ready to pay tribute to the good things which have resulted from the Welfare Fund. We called the Levy the magic penny—a penny which, over the years, brought in no less than thirty-one million pounds.

We remember the times when there were no baths or canteens, and when our villages were without halls and playing fields. Not that everybody accepted Welfare without suspicion. I remember the difficulty we had in persuading some miners that pithead baths would be a good thing. There were traditions and habits to overcome. But I do not believe that there is a miner in the country today who would not say that the coming of the Welfare Fund was one of the finest things that has happened in the long years of this industry. Up to nationalisation, the Fund had built three hundred and sixty-six pithead baths, so that four hundred and fifty thousand men could leave the dirt where they got it—at the pithead. There were nine hundred canteens, over one thousand five hundred welfare schemes, fifteen convalescent homes and seven rehabilitation centres. There were also opportunities for the education of miners' children.

All this was brought about by Acts of Parliament, because the colliery owners of those days could not be depended upon to provide these things. But with the coming of nationalisation it was obvious that there must be a change in the welfare structure. The Nationalisation Act required the National Coal Board to look after the welfare of its employees, and for a time we have had the Board and the Miners' Welfare Commission working side by side under the umbrella of the National Miners' Welfare Joint Council. This resulted in the Board adding six and a half million pounds to the amount available for building pithead baths, which helped to keep up the rate of building, despite the ever-rising costs. This arrangement was a temporary expedient and your Executive Committee has given careful thought to the best plan for the future.

On July 24th, 1951, we signed an agreement with the Board which we believe will ensure even greater benefits in the field of welfare in the days to come. This agreement has now come into effect through the Miners' Welfare Act, which became law earlier this year. The Board have undertaken to accept full responsibility for all welfare at the pithead. The building of pithead baths will, therefore, no longer be restricted by lack of money.

Already, since April, 1947, the Board have met the full costs of operating the baths. This means that the men no longer have to pay subscriptions which, in some cases were as much as one shilling a week. This alone is

costing the Board over one and a half million pounds a year. We should like to see the Board go one step further and provide free towels and soap, and perhaps a laundry service as well!

The Board will also be responsible for canteens. Most of these were built during the war and large sums will be needed to bring them up to the standard of the best industrial canteens. The provision of good meals at reasonable cost to the mineworker is now the full responsibility of the Board.

To deal with the social side of welfare, a new organisation has been set up. This is the Coal Industry Social Welfare Organisation, which will be under the joint control of the Union and the Board. This organisation has far greater opportunities than were open to the Miners' Welfare Commission. Social welfare will no longer be restricted by the rather narrow limits laid down by previous Acts of Parliament. There is no field of social welfare which will benefit the miner and his family in their leisure time that is not open to this new organisation. We have taken over the unspent balances from the old district funds, and they will be used in the Areas which earned them. The Board have added one million pounds and when that is near to being spent we will go back for more. At a time of national cuts in capital expenditure, funds will be available for miners' welfare. There are Government restrictions in building licences, but the organisation has already been successful in Scotland in overcoming them to some extent.

The status of the miner as an industrial worker has, by our vigilance, been raised. In many ways the welfare of the mineworker is ahead of other industries. But there is still much to be done, for the miner still works and often lives in conditions which no other worker has to endure. The Miners' Welfare Commission has come to an end, but these new arrangements will enable those things which we all desire for the welfare of the miner and his family to be achieved in ways that were undreamed of before.

Long discussions took place at the 1936 conference on the wages question. We were seeking for a new Minimum Wages Act, to abolish the district rates, and to have uniform rates throughout the country; but no figures were stated, because we had just had a reminder from the coalowners and the Tory Government, when we asked for an advance of two shillings per shift, that they considered in some areas a tanner was sufficient, and for some fourpence halfpenny per shift would suffice—but in any case, nobody in their opinion, was worth more than a bob a day. I have no doubt they have the same views today, and only wish they had the power to enforce it. They no doubt will be wiser on what we believe the wages of miners should be in 1952, when this Conference has finished. No one can accuse this Union of putting forward wage claims that are frivolous, nor will we do so this week, but let me remind those who write so cynically of the miner and his lot, that over this last ten years, when Britain's life depended upon coal, as it does now, we got very little help in manpower from British non-mining circles, to keep the home fires burning. It still remains true that the successful change in manpower at the pits today comes from mining families, not from the homes and hearths of the critics, whose chief virtue is their aloofness to anything dangerous to their thick hides.

It was also from the last Scarborough conference that steps were taken

towards forming one national mineworkers' organisation, for all workers in and about the coal mines of Great Britain. From that day we have never once turned back; it marked the beginning of a new era for the miners of this nation, that shall be continued. If you want to have a correct and faithful picture of the long road we have travelled since 1936, spend a few hours in the reports presented by the National Executive Committee. The change in economic conditions has given the opportunity to enjoy a higher status, and the wages alone show how far we have succeeded. Never in the history of the British miner has there ever been placed before his representatives at an annual conference of his Union, such a record of progress and achievement as the National Executive Committee places before you this week. It is the complete answer to those who shout for something to be done, but seldom stop to examine what has been done.

Last year in my address I warned the conference :

"We at least realise that whatever may be the professions of Labour's political opponents, it would spell disaster for the mining industry, if their suggested plans were to materialise. We as miners know from bitter experience what Toryism meant to us, and to the mining industry. Let this nation think twice of the fate that awaits it, if the reactionary Tory solutions are applied to this industry. The miners do not want Toryism and the nation cannot afford it. It is our duty to let that fact be known now, so that the terrible consequences can be understood. . . . It is, therefore, the duty of every delegate here, every official, in whatever capacity he functions, not merely to vote Labour, but to work unceasingly for Labour. There is no second choice, there is no alternative—we will either go forward with Labour or backward with Toryism."

Even although miners are keen students of politics, we could hardly believe that Tories would act in such a way as they have done since the Election. I shall not recall the promises they made, either in their election broadcasts, or in their election addresses—we know them only too well—although these are not made in the heat of the moment (which might provide some slight excuse for "overstatement"), but are carefully written and rehearsed, their originators now wish to deny what they put forward then as the truth. We even find that this Government can find time to waste in discussing whether hypnotism should be allowed in the theatre at public performances !

If men who claim to be statesmen and leaders of the nation deliberately put into print and send out statements over the air, and then ignore the "truths" they have propounded, how can they expect the younger generation to accept their words any more? Let these Tory politicians who deliberately have misled the nation, and who did not obtain a majority of the electorate, leave political life. Men and women as guilty as they are must know that their word is no longer accepted. How dare they talk of juvenile delinquency, how dare they talk of the decadence of moral standards, when they themselves stand condemned by their own words, and have wilfully misled the electorate. All the evasive arts of which they may feel themselves capable—all the word spinning they may employ, will never eradicate the tricks they employed to get power, not for the public good, but simply for the lover of power and of office, and for the furtherance of their big business interests. They who use

the dictatorship of words to become the dictators of a nation, are not far removed from those who use an electorate to obtain power, and then wipe out the electors. The same result follows, until the people have the opportunity at the ballot box to erase the errors; and no one has any doubts as to what would be the result if we had a General Election today.

Whatever we may think, and however we may feel about the trickery and deceit that was adopted to win power for the Tories in October 1951, it must not be made either the excuse or the alibi for similar tactics. We might as well face now as later this choice of whether, because we lose a General Election, we should then use our industrial power for political objectives. Frankly, I believe that to follow that line, as has been advocated in some quarters, and usually from those who opposed the Labour Party at the General Election, would be as great an evil as the evil they condemn. You know as well as I do that many of those who talk in that strain are not concerned with any other idea, except that a chance is presenting itself for making trouble. The logical course of those who give support to industrial action for political objectives, would be to say bluntly to the electorate, if we do not have our representatives elected to power, then get ready for another General Strike. I urge you to be more than ever vigilant with regard to those who advocate a policy that can only lead to national suicide, and that would, of course, include you, and your families. Do not allow the grievances you may have, whatever be their nature, to be used by those who have axes to grind in other directions. The tactics that are being employed, however contradictory they can be proved, are not to benefit the Labour Party in its march back to power for the common weal. The majority of those who advocate such tactics would do equally as much, if not more, to destroy the Labour Party tomorrow. Out of the turmoil they could create, they would make it appear as if you had adopted the idea for your own destruction. Might I commend to those who support this atomic remedy to remove political inequalities, the view of one who, as no delegate would dispute, has given some thought to this problem, my colleague the General Secretary, Arthur Horner, when he put on record the following statement :

“The aim and purpose of trade unionism must be in all circumstances ‘to safeguard and improve the working and living standards of its members.’ This must be the case irrespective of the character of the Government at any given time. But it cannot be pursued in isolation from the general and permanent interests of the community. Due regard must always be paid to the effect of the actions of one trade union upon the membership of other trade unions. Experience has taught that conditions such as prosperity and destitution are in the long run indivisible, and that hurt to the working class generally, which might result in a temporary advantage to a section of the workers, will, in the end, damage the whole community.

This view, which has motivated the National Union of Mineworkers, is particularly important when a trade union virtually holds a monopoly in the production of a vital commodity such as coal. It is this conception, coupled with the miners’ high sense of social responsibility, which has made possible the restraint which has consciously been exercised by the National Union of Mineworkers, especially since nationalisation.”

Those words appeared in a signed article on September 30th, 1951, in the *Sunday Times*. They were, of course, his personal view, just as the words I have spoken are my personal view. Surely it is essential on matters so vital to our interests as miners, and also to the economy of the nation, that we pay some regard to the facts.

I feel sure that it would be very much misunderstood, both by our colleagues in the British Labour Movement, and certainly in the International Movement, if nothing were said of the action of some of our members in refusing to allow Italians to work alongside them in our mines. The Union was a party to an agreement with the National Coal Board to allow Italians to work in the pits for two reasons; firstly, British labour could not be provided to do the job that was required to keep Britain's economy going, and secondly, to give datal workers an opportunity to become piece-workers.

We can treat with the contempt it deserves the scandalous suggestion of a Tory M.P. on this issue, except that if the records are examined, it is obvious that there was relatively no trouble until he interfered. Perhaps the remark was made in order to make mischief, as that has been the Tory ambition at all times, throughout the troubled history of this industry. But that does not condone the action of our members in striking against Italians who were members of this organisation. It was the first time in our history that a Miners' Lodge took action against its fellows, on the grounds that they were foreigners. The Yorkshire Area officials did their utmost to convince those members that they were wrong. Every credit is due to them and the local officials of the Bullcroft Lodge, for standing up to those members who took steps that must make every delegate here hang his head in shame at such conduct. How can we talk of internationalism, how dare we talk of racial discrimination, how can our Members of Parliament raise in the House of Commons, the cause of the downtrodden and exploited in far-off climes, who happen to belong to other nations? If this attitude continues to operate, then the proud place the British miners have occupied in international affairs will cease, and we shall descend to the lowest depths. If this were the last speech I was ever allowed to make, I say to you, as one who believes in, and values human freedom and brotherhood—as one who has some respect for the memory of the international work of old miners like Keir Hardie, Herbert Smith and Robert Smillie—we must condemn this crime against helpless men and their families, otherwise liberty, and the sacredness of contracts cease to have any meaning.

Having touched on the subject of our relations with workers in other countries, I want to draw your attention to the very excellent report written by the coalmining team sent by the Anglo-American Council on Productivity, which spent an intensive six weeks investigating the methods of coal production and other aspects of the mining industry in the United States. This report, by the way, together with the other forty odd so far published, and the work of the Council itself, is as useful as anything one can find to answer those people who choose to sneer at the efforts the United States has made to help the nations of western civilisation. Nowhere in this report or in any of the publications issued by the Anglo-American Council will you read of the "great leader" or of some leader and teacher who is responsible for

achievements in production. This is what we continually get dinned into our ears by the faithful—and therefore the few—who receive permission to look behind the Iron Curtain.

By contrast if you care to read the Council's report you will see that the high outputs in American pits are attributable in no small measure to the team spirit that runs through the ranks of management and workpeople. I am not suggesting that the five hundred million or so tons of coal produced annually in America by four hundred thousand men is the result of teamwork and team spirit only. We know only too well the natural geological advantages enjoyed by the American industry. Teamwork, however, is of vital importance and in terms of co-operation and joint understanding, is essential to any form of effective industrial activity—we know this from our experience in our own industry. As the report indicates, the Americans have obviously paid great attention to this side of production. Maybe they have had to. For not only is there considerable competition between different companies in the mining industry, but coal has to compete with oil, natural gas and hydro-electricity.

As we know to our cost, the mineowners in Britain before the war were subject to competition which they fought by cutting wage rates. In the United States at the present time, however (and as with our own nationalised industry), production costs are reduced by cutting inefficiency. This they do by mechanising up to the hilt. Of course, American coalmining conditions lend themselves to intensive mechanisation and the use of power equipment, and the situation is exploited to the full—not the men, mark you; it is the machines which are made to do the work. Here, as the Americans see it, is where the need for teamwork comes in. Higher production and lower costs are to be achieved by continually improved planning and organisation, high standards of management, and research into and installing labour-saving machinery which, it is recognised, demands considerable flexibility and adaptability on the part of the workers on the coal face and elsewhere. Not only must there be adaptability, however, there must also be a willingness on the part of the workers to accept new and constantly changing working conditions. To the credit of American management, they have recognised that workers' acceptance is best where there is willingness and freedom. Nothing is possible in modern industry without co-operation and co-operation does not get far unless there is understanding. American management by and large sees to it that the unions and workers they are working with do have the opportunity to understand the developments going on in the industry and the pits. Planning will go astray unless there is full understanding of the implications and repercussions. And I might add that the United Mineworkers of America take good care that nothing is put in hand without their understanding and approval. This is teamwork, not paternalism or company unionism. The union is not seeking to manage the coalmining industry—that is what management is for. The union has its own responsibilities—there is no question of there not being two sides to the industry, but that has not prevented teamwork and co-operation to their mutual satisfaction. American miners are among the best paid workers in the States, and they have used their bargaining strength to obtain substantially better benefits,

welfare and security than operate in most other American industries.

Do not misunderstand me on this last point. American miners and workers generally have some way to go before they have the overall social security and welfare facilities that we have in this country. I would like to see an American team representing their mining industry, spending six weeks or so looking over our industry, and seeing for themselves the old and the new in British mining. We are not so highly mechanised and the geological conditions will surely strike them as being impossible. But we can show them something regarding welfare and social conditions. We may have some isolated and perhaps dilapidated mining villages, but we have no mining camps. I am sure also that the formal consultative machinery which has been set up in the industry will command their attention. As far as informal relations and consultations are concerned, however, it would seem from the report that our industry has something to learn from American experience. I do not believe, in fact, that formal consultative machinery will work really successfully unless informal relationships are good. And here let me say that in my opinion a major responsibility in this respect lies with the mine managers. The initiative lies largely with them. Let them think of the miners as members of a team, willing to help solve the industry's problems and accept responsibility if kept fully informed and their advice really sought. As the Anglo-American Council says, we want "collaboration on the job and not between offices" and as American management recognises "administration is a matter of people."

I would like to think that everyone in the mining industry felt it necessary to study the report on "Coal." It is worth it. Certainly it is about the American mining industry which is, as I have said, vastly different from ours, but it is written by people who have spent their lives in British pits and ought to know what they are talking about. Don't forget there were six of our Union members in the team.

And you know, this last fact is quite unique. Many of us have been down pits in different parts of the world and at one time and another management and technical groups have made their own investigating visits. But never before has there been industry investigation by teams representing management, technicians and operatives. A measure of the success of the idea—which originated from discussions between the late Sir Stafford Cripps and Paul Hoffman in 1948, on how to utilise technical assistance resources being made available through European Co-operation Administration (now Mutual Security Administration) is the publicity given to the reports and the discussion meetings and conferences going on around the reports in the industries concerned. The Anglo-American Council itself and the reports have done much to stimulate productivity consciousness and no one denies the need for increased production—even those who advocate the social and industrial systems in countries east of the Iron Curtain.

The main job of the reports is really to seek to promote discussions and consideration of their recommendations. From the beginning it has never been imagined that it would be possible—even if it were desirable—to introduce American methods and that more nebulous concept "the American way of life" into Britain. The main thought at the back of the Council's

mind was that here was an opportunity for exchanging industrial information and experience, and both sides of the Council have agreed that they each have learned a lot. It is foolish to pretend we have nothing to learn from one another. Dignity, as someone said in the House of Commons the other week, is like a top hat—if you stand on it too long it is not much good.

In May, the Anglo-American Council on Productivity, of which I was a member, held its final session in London and officially wound up its business, as was originally intended, although there is still some clearing up work to be done yet. It has been an undoubted success—so much so from the British point of view that the three organisations (the Trades Union Congress, British Employers' Confederation and the Federation of British Industries) have decided to form a British Productivity Council in order to carry on with the good work already started. I personally hope that the system of exchange visits with other countries will continue to be a major function of the new centre, because not only do we get more balanced reports from representative teams but our own people in particular make personal contact with their opposite members, from which grows international understanding, goodwill and friendship—and who would deny the necessity for this?

It is tragic to us in trade unions which have done their utmost to build up goodwill relations with other nations, to listen to some of our own politicians in their attacks on the United States. Why they refuse to face the simple fact that it is impossible for the United States and ourselves to face and overcome the realities of today unless we march together, is beyond me.

Much ink has been spilt on whether the ideas put forward by the Labour Government to safeguard the peace of the world were correct or not, when they launched their rearmament proposals. The critics of Labour policy forget one fact, that any government would be neglecting its duty to its country, if it refused to face up to the nation's needs. No one doubts for a moment that the only hope for a war-weary and war-shattered world lies in the United Nations. And that means that when an act of aggression takes place, such as happened in Korea, then we don't run away from it. It is so easy to accept the view that the other fellow is always right, and we in Britain are always wrong. If we should have learnt one lesson over the last decade, it is, that the aggressor never responds to those who wish to embrace him, only to choke those who turn the other cheek. The difference between the aggressor of today and yesterday is non-existent.

It is worth noting that often those who subscribe to the so-called Five Power Peace Pact Policy, and appeasement of the aggressor, in Korea, are often those who desire industrial upheaval in Britain.

Nobody appreciates better than the Miners the changed attitude of the public to Labour and its problems. One of the chief factors in bringing about this new understanding has been the *Daily Herald*.

When the *Herald* was launched as a national daily by Odhams Press and the T.U.C., under the far-sighted generalship of the late Ernest Bevin, the day-to-day work of ordinary men and women was practically ignored by British daily newspapers. It was the *Herald* which first threw a true and friendly light on our social and political struggle, our interests and way of life.

Its pioneering, just twenty-two years ago, stimulated interest in Labour throughout the whole world's Press, but it is still the only paper which can be trusted to express our point of view fully and accurately, and to back us staunchly through thick and thin. It is, therefore, just as vital to us today that our paper should command the biggest sale and influence. With nearly eight million trade unionists and almost fourteen million Labour voters, a daily circulation of at least four million could well be possible.

It is here that we can all help, and we all should help, because more sales for the *Herald* means more power to the Movement. I should like to reach the position where trade unionists take the *Herald* as a logical part of their membership. If you carry a union card and vote Labour, isn't it the obvious thing to do? Besides, politics apart, you can buy no newspaper that is better than the *Herald* today from any point of view. It gives all the reliable news and entertaining features; and it is edited with a deep, sincere understanding of human values. Let us read the *Herald* with the loyalty its proved friendship to us deserves and advise our friends to do the same.

And my final word to you today is—let no action we may take this week in any way weaken our faith in Labour's triumph, just as we know that those we have the honour to represent will never retreat in their resolve to work for that triumph.