

PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS

MR. E. JONES (Vice-President) : It is now my privilege and pleasure to call upon the President to delivery his first Presidential Address, and inasmuch as this is his inaugural Conference following his appointment, I am sure you would regard it as remiss on my part if I did not, in your name, express to him our greetings and good wishes for a very successful term of office, and to express the hope that under his control and guidance this Union will be taken a stage further along the road of progress towards the realisation of all

our legitimate dreams and aspirations. In your name, I have now pleasure in calling on Mr. W. E. Jones to deliver his Presidential Address.

MR. W. E. JONES (President) : Fellow members, it is my privilege for the first time to welcome you to our Annual Conference. For 15 years this Chair has been occupied by a blunt, outspoken north countryman. Will Lawther was appointed Vice-President in 1934; he became Acting President in 1938 on the resignation of Joseph Jones, and in the following year at the Union's Swansea Conference he was elected President.

The National Executive Committee have paid tribute to the work of Will Lawther. I am expressing the sentiments of us all, I am sure, including the men in the coalfields, when I say that we wish him and his wife good health, long life, and every happiness.

The period covered by his tenure of office as Vice-President and President of our organisation marked an epoch in the affairs of the mining industry, and of developments in the status and well-being of the mireworkers that are without a parallel in the country's social history. Whilst the consequences of long years of exploitation and neglect are still visible, the younger generation in our mining communities are becoming progressively better housed, better clothed, better fed than their fathers and grandfathers were. They have wider opportunities for the enjoyment of their leisure; opportunities also for advancement in the industry that employs them; and I am confident that the pace at which we are ridding the coalfields of the conditions that blighted the lives of earlier generations will be speeded up in the years that lie ahead.

I am proud to stand in the great succession, and I want to take this opportunity of thanking the mineworkers all over the British coalfields for the wonderful support and confidence they gave to me in the election of last February. I have now entered upon this new responsibility. It calls for experience, wisdom, devotion and hard work. I pledge myself to seek to further the aims of the men in this industry, to assist in promoting their well-being in the fullest meaning of the word. There will be times of perplexity, special responsibility, and difficult circumstance. When that happens I can take inspiration from the character and the quality of service given to our organisation by those who have occupied office in the past, from men like Ben Pickard and Bob Smillie, and others whose memory we honour. I shall be sustained, I believe, by the support, the goodwill, and the loyalty of the men in the coalfields.

The Trade Union Movement is one of our greatest democratic institutions : because it is strong, democracy is strong : and democracy is weakened when the Trade Union Movement is divided. It would be foolish to ignore the conflict of opinion on many problems of policy affecting our organised movement. It is in such circumstances of controversy that we need to remind ourselves of some elementary principles that must govern the practice of democracy. One is freedom of opinion. It is the right and duty of individual trade unionists to speak their mind freely and not to be coerced or intimidated by the intolerant behaviour of others. Yet it is equally the duty of individual trade unionists to abide by collective decisions that have been arrived at in open discussion, with a fair hearing for all.

It is more plainly the responsibility of a Union like ours to adhere firmly to the practice of free discussion and to acceptance of collective decisions. This National Union of Mineworkers is in a position of exceptional responsibility in this respect. It speaks for the whole of the mineworkers in all matters affecting their employment and their relations with the community. Both directly and through the General Council of the Trades Union Congress this Union has relations with all departments of Government and with most of the important national institutions that concern themselves with the life of the community. Because we insist upon maintaining the independence of our Union in all essential matters, and because we assert the same independence for the Movement to which we belong, it is essential that we speak with one voice and move with a single impulse of unity, if we are to demonstrate our real concern for the interests of the community.

As the one big Union in the mining industry we cannot act irresponsibly without injury to ourselves. For our lives are bound up with the industry. Upon its productive capacity as an integral factor in the national economy depend not only the just claims of those who work in it but the claims—no less just—for the welfare of the children and young people, their intellectual and moral development, for the care of the unfortunate, the sick, the incapacitated, the injured, and for the sustenance of the aged, and of all whose days of gainful employment have passed. There is a social, a collective responsibility for the amelioration of all conditions of life, and to get rid of the fears of poverty and want and insecurity that still haunt the homes of the working people. But a collective responsibility is one that is shared, and a great organisation such as ours, if it shirks its share, helps to undermine the foundations of democracy.

Democracy as we understand it is fighting for its very life. Its enemies in the world today are numerous, ruthless and subtle. Some of its enemies fight it openly. They seek to destroy the rights of free association, free assembly, free speech and freedom of opinion. These rights are not yet won for all peoples. They have not been achieved in trade union organisation in many parts of the world. There are Central Councils of Trade Unions which are subject to the authority of the State and the dictates of a political party not only in Russia and the Satellite Countries but in the Fascist countries of Spain and the Argentine. Instead of standing up in defence of the workers the unions have been made in many countries, instruments of the workers' exploitation, the means by which unpopular and unjust measures are imposed upon them.

To achieve the most efficient organisation of industry, including our own, is of the greatest importance. Any industry that is not making the most and best of its technical equipment, and improving it, is not only falling down on its job, it is exploiting the labour of its workers and impoverishing the national economy as a whole ; and thus limiting our capacity to assist in developing not only our own resources but those of the economically backward countries. Through the T.U.C. the trade unions are committed to co-operation in the campaign to increase productivity and to raise the standards of efficiency in industry. It is out of the increased resources made available by better methods of productivity that the means will be found to raise the level of wages, to

establish better conditions of employment, and to provide higher standards of life, not only for ourselves but for our fellow workers in other lands.

Industrial production as a whole increased in 1953. Last year's increase over the previous year, and in the first few months of this year, reveals a hopeful trend. The same can be said about the national economy as a whole. But it should be remembered that since the end of 1951 favourable conditions in terms of import prices, during which our export prices have remained stable, were a great help to Britain. It was in consequence of these import price reductions that we were able to buy with a given amount of our exports approximately 17 to 20 per cent greater volume of imported goods. There is now an indication that the favourable trend in trade has come to an end. We may find the position slightly reversed. This puts upon us the responsibility of developing a greater export drive. Capital requirements of the under-developed areas of the world have also to be met out of our resources, enlarged as they must be by higher productivity and larger world trade.

This providing of resources for the under-developed areas of the world must not be meaningless words. Ideals of humanity and good citizenship, considerations of neighbourliness and concern for the well-being of our fellow creatures, whatever their colour or level of cultural attainment, require us to help them to feed themselves adequately and to secure the means of more normal lives. It is a gain to the whole of humanity when any section of it is lifted out of poverty and enabled to live self-supporting lives and at the same time to make the natural resources of their country a contribution to the wealth of the world.

An impulse of compassion is involved here. We were horrified by the terrible calamity that overtook Lynmouth in the summer of 1952 and by the happenings on the East Coast of Britain at the beginning of last year. We made the resolve then that such tragic occurrences must be prevented. Let us remember that in many parts of Asia such disasters are a part of the people's experience every year. Famines and floods are a frequent occurrence in Asian countries. People die in thousands and scores of thousands for want of food. Their homes, their belongings are lost in the rains of the monsoon which flood their areas and leave nothing behind but desolation and despair. What these countries require are irrigation schemes and projects that will conserve water for their use during periods of drought. We have given our support to the Colombo Plan because it calls for resources, technicians and engineers to build dams and reservoirs, to improve roads and transport, and to provide for the material and physical well-being of countless millions of underfed people.

That is why the obligation rests upon our own industry to increase its output and expand its activities. Our exports of coal responding to a healthy demand from abroad accounted for an addition of two million tons of coal in 1953 excluding bunkers; and this earned Britain £62 million. Against this we must place the importation of about half a million tons of continental coal needed to meet the serious household position and the necessity of ensuring winter stocks at a safe level. The loss on the sale of this imported coal at British prices was over £1.1 million.

During the first six months of this year the output of coal has topped that

of the corresponding period of 1953. But internal consumption this year has increased by nearly 3 per cent. Coal exports are absorbing about the same tonnage. Last year inland consumption of coal went up by 1.3 million tons. Electricity and power stations, despite increasing efficiency in generation, called for an addition of $2\frac{3}{4}$ per cent on their consumption of the preceding year. These factors in combination mean that stocks which will be needed next winter are not being replenished at the rate or to the amount that the situation requires. A further coal crisis is rapidly developing.

Last year saw a heavy drain upon the industry's manpower. We started 1953 in a better position for men than some years past, but by the year's end wastage had exceeded recruitment by 11,000. Present signs are that we shall more than cover wastage by recruitment this year.

No industry has a greater need of a more stable labour force than coalmining. It must be ensured of 725,000 men. I would impress this problem on the whole nation, when criticism is rife about productivity in the industry. I have already said that stocks must be safeguarded for next winter and exports maintained. The solution of this problem is to obtain in the remainder of this year 4 million tons more than the 1953 output.

Capital development schemes at collieries will help productivity but these schemes often take years to fructify; and there is sometimes a temporary decrease of the number of men available for current production work while these schemes are being carried out. It must be remembered that since 1947—and in spite of the five day week agreement—each year has seen the miners working extended hours at most pits. This has meant in effect in most instances almost a six day working week. Last summer we had the second week's holiday with pay, but work was operated on many Saturdays during the summer—and again in the summer of this year (so far as we have had it) the mineworkers are behaving similarly.

We can claim to have adopted a reasonable attitude in relation to the nation's needs. Nevertheless production, all of which is so badly needed, has been affected by stoppages of work. This is a serious concern to responsible leadership in the Union and all unions. We must find a solution of these disputes by consideration of the circumstances giving rise to them before stoppages occur. There must be understanding by management and full use by workmen of the conciliation machinery of the industry—factors contributing to better productivity. We have to improve productivity by $2\frac{1}{2}$ per cent to meet the situation, taking into account the fluctuations of manpower in 1954.

The alternatives are—a coal shortage with a slowing down of industry and short-time working; the cutting of exports, or the importation of European, and possibly, American coal. Let us grind our teeth against each and all of these alternatives, and make the effort to ensure that the extra required is provided from our own pits. Let us all play our part in meeting the crisis for coal which seems determined to beset us again this year.

Like the working people generally the miners have had experience of the increased cost of living. The budgets of a Tory Chancellor of the Exchequer have made havoc of prices for the domestic consumer. The cutting of

subsidies in 1952 and 1953 was a great disservice both to industry and the country generally.

Money has lost more of its purchasing power under this present Government. Money values decline in consequence of price increases. The lower income groups spend the greater part of their wages upon rent and food, and it is food prices which have risen with greatest effect while increased rents are foreshadowed by the Tory Government's Rent and Repairs Bill.

In the interests of industry's good relations and for reasons of domestic and economic justice this Union calls upon the Government to steady food prices—and not only that but to take immediate steps (now possible in consequence of reduced import costs) to bring down the prices of all those commodities that form an essential part of our basic domestic requirements. The biggest single contribution to peace in industry, and a great contribution to restoring confidence among workers throughout Britain, would be the pursuit by Government of budgetary industrial and economic policies which will make money wages real wages. Let the Government heed this warning. By its present policies it is gradually reversing the distribution of the national income brought about by the Labour Government. This cannot be ignored either by the workers or their trade unions. The 1953 Budget made concessions to industry which, through a lower rate of income tax, abolition of the Excess Profits Levy and restoration of initial allowances on plant and machinery, meant a cost to the Exchequer of nearly £420 million for the year. Further, in the 1954 Budget the Chancellor gave industry a new investment allowance. Through the normal depreciation allowance, industry was already able, over a lifetime of an asset, to discount the full cost of the asset for tax purposes. Now, in addition, industry can in most cases discount a further 20 per cent of the cost of an asset, and this irrespective of whether it represents an investment which is essential for the national economy.

Plainly, to get justice and to secure a reversal of this policy we must work for the return of a new Labour Government.

We are concerned about the economics and finances of our industry. It has been said by various people that the Coal Board's balance sheet does not matter. I do not share this view. The public reacts to profit and loss accounts in all the nationalised industries, and I have no doubt about their right to make their observations and comments and to express their approval or otherwise. It is a matter of importance, therefore, that the product of our industry should be sold at the right price.

But what is the right price? My reply is that the wage standards of mineworkers must be right in the van of the wage earnings of any industry. When one remembers the arduous and hazardous nature of employment in the industry, the grim and confining aspects of underground work, the depths of blackness in which this occupation is followed—all this puts a premium upon the worth of those who earn their living in the coalfields. Their health and safety must be a major consideration—and unless it is, the price of life and limb and health can be tragically extravagant—a price that is paid by the men themselves.

Do not let us lose sight of the fact that the pithead price of British coal is

on the average, and quality for quality, at least 25s. per ton below that in the European countries. Good wages, respectable social conditions, full provision for safety, health and welfare are a fair charge on prices.

A good deal of our coal has been sold to industry at less than the cost of production. If it were sold at marginal prices, as some economists have proposed, prices would rise by not less than £1 per ton. This would make a very great difference to the Board's balance sheet. It would be an easy means of removing the debit on those accounts, two-thirds of which has arisen from subsidisation of the price of imported coal. The attitude the mineworkers (at least) are entitled to take is that industry must pay the proper price for its coal. Increases in the prices of the more valuable carbon and other coals do not (as I have said) cover the cost of production. The issue has therefore to be faced : is a nationalised coal industry to be required by the Government to transfer its product to major private enterprise, high profit-making industry, at uneconomic prices thus enabling remunerative profits to be made by private industry which are often inflated and unwarranted?

We say this should stop. The administrative scheme of nationalisation should be amended to enable the National Coal Board to fix coal prices without reference to the Government. It is well to remember that whilst certain heavy industries have the cost of fuel as a high proportion of their costs, for 85 per cent of British industry the cost per unit of industrial production for fuel and power is less than 1s. in the £.

I must take time to refer to the question of national insurance and industrial injuries insurance. The T.U.C. General Council in submitting their evidence on social insurance to the Beveridge Committee during the war argued for uniformity of rates of benefit. Since 1946, because of inflation, benefits have fallen to a level substantially below the original subsistence level. This is a serious threat to the social security scheme, and must be remedied.

We call upon the Government to increase all national insurance benefits forthwith and this Union in association with the T.U.C. General Council must undertake to play an effective part in the discussions that will take place on the quinquennial valuation of the National Insurance Scheme and upon the benefits that should be available as of right for those for whom the scheme provides.

We also sound from this Conference a clarion call for improvement in the general benefits of the Industrial Injuries Scheme and for improvement of the schedules of the scheme of the amounts payable as a result of industrial disablement.

Before this Conference ends we shall be considering some vital problems arising out of the present international situation. Since our meeting at Hastings last year the situation has undergone a grave deterioration. The outlook is grim.

We have, in my judgment, to face the facts not only about the breakdown at the Berlin Conference, but also the frustration and disappointment of the meetings at Geneva, where the fundamental task of the statesmen who came together, was to find a peaceable settlement by negotiation; and plainly they have not yet succeeded. We would not disregard, however, the brighter

developments of the past two weeks, and our hope is that these developments will lead to a truce and a settlement in Indo-China.

Where responsibility for the breakdown of negotiations in the Berlin Conference really lies may be a matter for discussion. But I will frankly state my own opinion that the course of policy pursued by the Foreign Ministers of the Western nations was thoroughly in accord with the underlying principles and aims of the Potsdam Agreement. It was intended in that agreement to eliminate Nazism and militarism in Germany. There was agreement, on paper, to safeguard the peaceable development of Germany by re-establishing it as a single economic unit, and reconstructing the political life of the German people on a democratic basis.

The history of the last decade has shown how these aims were frustrated. Russia never implemented them. The division of Germany into zones of occupation resulted in the destruction of freedom in Eastern Germany where re-militarisation under Soviet domination went on until armed forces of nearly 100,000 had been equipped with military weapons, trained and organised in artillery, tank and infantry battalions. The Eastern Zone of Germany was stripped of its economic resources. The provision of the Potsdam Agreement, requiring payment of reparations to be made so as to leave the German people with enough resources for their subsistence without external aid, was violated by Russia. Russia demanded and wrung out of Germany reparations from current output regardless of Germany's need to establish a balanced economy. The plight of the German people in such circumstances was so desperate that our own country, living then on short commons, and hardly able to maintain the supply of strictly rationed food, had to make available part of our scanty supplies to help to feed Germany.

I need not recite the tragic tale of the blockade of Berlin which was transcended by our great air lift. Nor need I emphasise what it has cost this country, along with the other western powers, to maintain some hope of Germany's redemption, by preserving the institutions of law and freedom in the other occupation zones, and by initiating and co-operating with the efforts made to restore industrial and economic life in these zones. Can anyone truthfully contend that the part Russia has played in the course of their occupation of German territory is comparable in spirit, in purpose and in practice to our occupation? Can anyone assert that Russia's refusal to accept the solution of Germany's problems proposed by the Western statesmen, directed towards re-establishing the political and geographical unity of Germany, under an all-German Government based on free elections, has been conceived in the interests of Germany? Is it not rather manifest that the development of a great imperialism by Russia has extended her political control along with economic and military domination over an additional 179,649 square miles inhabited by 21 million people—apart from the control Russia exercises over the satellite countries: Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Rumania and Albania?

These are the historical facts, fellow delegates, as they relate to the position in Europe, with particular reference to Germany and, I will add, to Austria.

Is it not evident that Russia has played the same game at Geneva that she played at Berlin? I am not going to defend all that has been said or

attempted by the Western governments about the situation in the Far East. There is room for legitimate dissent from the policies of the American State Department at different stages of the war in Indo-China, and in connection with the effort to establish a system of defence for South-East Asia. I don't feel myself that the same criticism can be directed against the policy of our government as it has been conducted at Geneva. The practical question that faces this conference, as it faces the whole of our organised Movement, is what are we to do?—what policies are we to support in the light of the breakdown of the effort to secure peace by agreement? What are we to do about the rearmament of Western Germany and of bringing to an end our military occupation of the Western Zone? That occupation is costing us many millions, and Germany itself is being defended in a military sense against further conquest and annexation without paying for its defence. Is it reasonable that this state of affairs should continue? Is it not the common sense of the situation that now confronts us in Europe in the breakdown of the Berlin Conference and the situation at Geneva, to continue the effort to strengthen and extend the European defence system and to bring Germany within the European defence community with its armed forces controlled as a European army?

You will have an opportunity during this annual conference to express your views on these grave issues. Let me urge you to discuss them in a realistic spirit. Do not let us be influenced by illusions. The high hopes that we of the British Trade Union and Labour Movement have cherished have not been realised, and I myself see no alternative but to continue to build up and fortify our means of defence, without abating in the least our support of any and every effort that can be made to come to terms with Soviet Russia and Communist China and enable us to live together though our systems of Government differ, without drenching the world again in blood.