

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

MR. E. JONES (Vice-President) : Fellow delegates, it is now my privilege and pleasure to call upon the President, Mr. W. E. Jones, O.B.E., to deliver his Presidential Address.

CHAIRMAN : Fellow Members, this Conference marks the beginning of the second decade in the life of the National Union of Mineworkers. Ten years ago at Blackpool we held the first Annual Conference of the Union. We were looking forward with confidence to the future.

It is difficult to re-live the emotions, the hopes and feelings of that year. The European struggle that convulsed the world had come to an end with the defeat of Nazism in Germany and Fascism in Italy. The statesmen of the grand alliance were together in conference to plan the overthrow of Japan, which we regarded as the last enemy of democracy and freedom, an enemy whose collapse was brought about by a new weapon that lit up a vista of terror and peril for all mankind. The map of the world was being re-drawn, on a fresh pattern of power relationships that opened up, though we did not know it, an era of cold war.

Yet our hopes were high. We were on the eve of a General Election which was to sweep into office a Labour Government with the power to implement its full programme of economic reorganisation and social justice. That Government fulfilled its mandate. It lifted the nation, exhausted and impoverished by six years of war, to a new level of energy. Changes were instituted in the ownership and direction of vital industries and services; existing methods of social insurance were developed into a comprehensive system of social security, with a more equitable distribution of the good things of life and fair shares for all. For more than half the decade Labour ruled, and its remarkable achievement is more than half forgotten—the building up of capital goods, new factories, schools and dwellings, machinery and equipment, the recovery of substantial amounts of our export trade, the beginnings of that great liberating movement which brought India, Pakistan, Burma and Ceylon into the fellowship of the free nations and broke the grasp of the older imperialism upon the life of the Asian and African peoples.

The starting point of that decade saw, too, great changes within our Industry and within the Union. Eighteen months after our Union's first Conference the pits of Britain were vested in a Public Corporation. How necessary the change in ownership of the Industry was, may be gathered from the statistics of coal production, to say nothing of the strife and embittered human relations in the coalfields.

In the 30 years preceding nationalisation there was a continuing fall in coal production. In 1913 it stood at 287 million tons. In 1945 it was less than 175 million tons. At that time many pits were on the point of exhaustion; others needed to be closed altogether. Reconstruction and reorganisation were urgent.

But it was not only a question of "new pits for old" it was also a question of the availability of men with the necessary experience and knowledge to plan the far-reaching developments that must be laid down. Mining engineers and planners were not available in sufficient numbers. Men had to be recruited and trained for the task which was urgent.

Moreover, the social history of the mining areas was a tale of poverty and privation, and human misery among the mineworkers and their families. Had such affairs continued it is certain that the whole economy of the nation would have sunk beyond the point of redemption: we could never have recovered our place among the great manufacturing and trading nations; the standard of life of the whole people would have gone down, and the contraction of all the fields of employment would have seen the total of the workless population increasing by the million. Nationalisation of the mining industry broke that fatal cycle and arrested Britain's decline and fall. The first decade of our life as a national Union marked the impact of a tremendous economic change all over the country. The reorganisation of the mining industry under public ownership during the last ten years has been an essential contribution to the nation's recovery as a great industrial community and centre of an expanding world trade.

I shall return to this context in my later references to events in the closing years of this first decade of our Union's activities.

On the eve of our eleventh Annual Conference another General Election has produced results which are disappointing, and the cause of no little concern. Although it is true that under a Tory Government full employment has been preserved and wage standards on the whole have not declined, it cannot be denied that Tory policy is the reversal of the policy that Labour steadfastly pursued during its years of office. Labour aimed at a more equitable distribution of the nation's resources, and a square deal for the people who live by their work. Tory policy, on the contrary, has been to take back from social ownership those economic enterprises that can be exploited for private gain, to ease the tax burden of the rich and to provide the condition under which private enterprise can make bigger profits, pay bigger dividends and secure an inordinate increase in the value of stocks and shares.

The Tory policy is being pursued at a time when the trade balance is not vigorous. There are signs that the balance of payments is causing anxiety and this makes the Tory abandonment of exchange controls a source of danger. The Government's relaxation of exchange controls increases the danger of a flight from the pound sterling in balance of payment difficulties.

The economic position of the country calls, too, for the development of capital productivity resources, but this policy the Government has abandoned for freedom of action in regard to investment. Manufacturing industry has failed to provide investments of sufficient amount to create the degree of

capacity and efficiency that the position of British industry calls for. It is a significant fact that major investment increases have been effected mostly in the nationalised industries.

Only the determination of the Labour Government to secure the maximum degree of capital development and reconstruction possible—even to the point of grim austerity, to provide capital goods, enabled our standards of life to be maintained during the past three and a half years. We still require larger increases in capital investment, industrial equipment and technical efficiency to enable us to keep our place in the markets of the world.

When all this can be said of Tory policy, when it can be said further that under Tory rule the social standards of the Welfare State were lowered by increased prices, how can we explain the results of the General Election?

Election statistics certainly seem to indicate a degree of apathy among the electors. But the significant aspect is not so much the fall in the total poll, but the marked decline in the total Labour vote as compared with Tory totals. The Labour vote was smaller by $1\frac{1}{2}$ millions as against a fall of about half a million in the case of the Tory candidates. The reason why this happened, in my opinion, is that the Labour Party went into the election:—

- (i) without that measure of loyalty and enthusiasm that the Party must have, to give effect to its decisions on policy; and
- (ii) without that degree of self-discipline which would have enabled the Party to speak as with one voice to the electors.

The political Labour Movement can claim to be the most democratic in the world. Its policy is formulated as the common measure of agreement among the individual members of the Party organisation, the Trade Union affiliates and the co-operative and other bodies associated with it. What is called the "block vote" of this Union, as it is recorded at Party Conferences, is not an arbitrary or undemocratic instrument. Its use is substantially based upon the policies that our own Conferences determine from time to time. No delegation of this Union enters a Labour Party Conference without a review having been made of the Conference Agenda, and the Executive Committee's Report. Upon all important matters a decision has to be made as to how the Union's vote shall be cast.

It seems to me to be beyond question that thousands of workers and their wives did not vote for the Labour Party in this election because they were alienated by the dissensions and divisions revealed in the speeches, writings and discussions of those who disregarded majority decisions, and on occasion attacked the Party's official policy and showed hostility to its leadership. In the election campaign there was not one voice speaking for Labour but many voices.

Organisation within the constituencies is a matter to which the Labour Party will have to turn both attention and resources if elections are to be won. Undoubtedly the Tories have built up in the constituencies a more elaborate organisation than we have. Unquestionably they out-distanced us in the field of national publicity. Serious and immediate attention must be given to this weakness, which is not only one of organisation as such but of finance. This Union (I hope with the Trade Union Movement generally) will play its part.

But it will not be content with providing resources only. The Party's constitution and procedure must be respected and observed in all quarters.

Unofficial stoppages of work with consequential damage to the nation's economy also played a part in our failure to win the election. Lack of responsibility will never get us anywhere. Politicians and Trade Unionists alike owe a loyalty and responsibility to the political and industrial Labour Movement that none of us is entitled to abdicate.

The Trade Union Movement is responsible for the well-being of its members, and will insist upon its continuing rights to serve those interests even to the extent of tendering notice and terminating contracts. To the extent that confidence can be found in a Tribunal for the liquidation of disputes as we use in the mining industry, the finalisation of disputes without stoppages would result. But there are problems which our Trades Union Movement must tackle. Such problems as lack of cohesion and co-operation in the matter of negotiating claims and resolving disputes. Sometimes an uneasy feeling gets abroad that pressure might be applied to bring the Unions under some sort of survey and inquisition. The Trades Unions and the Trades Union Congress General Council, should this pressure ever be applied, must refuse to be stampeded by allegations that there is something seriously wrong with the Organisation and that the Trades Union house is in disorder. No good purpose will be served by considering any aspects of Trades Union organisation and policy in joint consultation with outside bodies or the Government. We must have amongst ourselves a careful, responsible and realistic examination of the difficulties that have arisen. Interference from outside would aggravate not settle. The solution means agreement amongst ourselves in the development of trades union policy.

So far as unofficial stoppages are concerned incidents take place at the pits from time to time which have an injurious effect upon our membership. Stoppages of work and restriction of effort against the counsels of responsible leaders have shown a marked increase. These stoppages and restrictions can and must be avoided. Often they arise from disputes over price lists and piecework payments. Our members who make up their minds hastily to settle disputes of this nature by ceasing work should take thought and remember that others of their mates suffer a loss which means great hardship for them. Many men not involved in a dispute lose working time and wages, too, and they are penalised from receiving the bonus shift, not by their own acts, but by the unofficial stoppage caused by those on strike.

Here again, do not let us exaggerate the mischief. Last year half the pits never lost a ton of coal through strikes. Three divisions between them lost less than 0·08 per cent. Let *management and workers* throughout the industry make this record the standard for the coalfields. Having expressed myself thus, I would point out that never in any year since the pits were nationalised has the industry lost 1 per cent of output by strikes. This year it seems that we shall lose more than in any year since 1947, but it is still possible to keep the loss of output well below 1½ per cent.

This has its bearing upon the general problem that confronts our industry. If the retrenchment of this loss could be fully secured, it would provide only

a small proportion of the amount of extra production our industry is called upon to provide. Why is production outpaced in a country whose greatest single and natural raw material is coal? Why is it that the consumption of coal outstrips the production of British pits? The present situation makes it necessary for the industry to examine the factors that require us to cut coal exports and increase imports. It is historically a fact that capacity was at its lowest when the pits were vested in the Coal Board. New capacity has had to be created, involving big reconstruction schemes, careful planning and the labour and experience of thousands of men. In the course of reconstruction underground, men who would otherwise be available for coal production are required in increasing numbers to employ their labour in developing new coal working areas; 40,000 of the industry's manpower are doing this work at the pits. For 30 years the industry had been allowed to go into decadence. Now, everybody is being urged almost to the point of neurosis to get more coal in a situation not of our making, that will take time to repair. Had the nation honoured the obligation to the miners in 1919 following the Sankey Commission's findings, decadence and lost capacity would not have taken place. The industry cannot take responsibility for the failure of the nation.

The Coal Board Plan projected an increase in annual output from just over 200 million tons in 1950 to 240-250 million tons in 1965. To raise capacity to this level means not only the development of working areas to provide the increase, but of further areas to repair the loss of 15 years of coal extraction. At least 110 million tons of additional output capacity has, therefore, to be provided in these 15 years.

This year and next will give us very little immediate increase. Big reconstruction schemes take many years to complete, and forces of decline are all the time pulling at the gains that are made. Not until 1958 and onwards will the extension of capacity be manifest.

In this situation every working face available should be manned to full productive capacity. But even this is not possible, because sufficient men are not available in the right places. It is a disturbing feature that manpower at the face is only about 2,000 more than it was in 1947. We need a further 25,000 men to build up the industry's manpower to 730,000; and 17,000 of these could be usefully employed at once. We cannot be held responsible for the failure of the nation to supply the reinforcements of manpower needed in the industry.

Those who find so much time to criticise the miners, the Coal Board and nationalisation, might be invited to focus their minds on all the facts. If they would do this they could understand better what I am now saying, and would inform themselves that miners by working extended hours are providing nearly 12 million extra tons of coal, equal to 5½ per cent of the industry's output, and, by this extra working, are bolstering up the capacity of the industry. But it cannot go on for ever.

There are other aspects of this problem of output. For every nine tons of coal required in Britain in 1938, 11 tons are called for in 1955. Consumption in that period increased from 178 million tons to an estimated 219 million tons this year; and the demand will rise. Unless exports are cut and imports

of up to a million tons a month brought in, industry will be slowed down. Unemployment and short-time working would be the result.

Reduced earnings from coal exports, and a prospective 10 to 12 million tons of coal imported could affect our balance of trade to the amount of £65-£75 million. To distribute each ton of coal brought to Britain at British coal prices a subsidy of about £2 10s. has to be paid, through the finances of the Coal Board. The subsidy of 12 million tons of imported coal means a cost to the coal industry of £30 million. It is not a cost that should fall upon the industry. It belongs to the nation and the exchequer. The Minister and the Government must take steps to remove this iniquitous burden from our shoulders. We take no responsibility for a situation which has been created by the decadence of the industry in the years of private enterprise.

I can touch only briefly upon such problems as those connected with the development of atomic power in the electricity industry where the coal or its equivalent required in ten years is estimated to be 65 million tons as against the present 40 million tons. These developments are of profound importance to our industry and the men employed in it, and must be kept under continuous review.

With the introduction of the Wages Structure for day-wage men a great step forward has been taken, for now every mineworker must be paid the rate for the job he is doing, whatever the area or pit at which he is employed. It is to the credit of many of our members that the amount this part of the Wages Structure is to cost, i.e. £14 million should be used for the purpose of removing inequalities in wages rates for the same jobs. The examination of a Wages Structure as it affects piece-workers in the industry must next be undertaken.

This Union calls for the removal of the injustice suffered by many totally or partially injured workmen whose claim for benefit comes within the field of Workmen's Compensation. There are no grounds for one class of incapacitated workman receiving as much as 27s. 6d. per week less than another in comparative circumstances, except that one accident happened before July 4th, 1948, whilst the other occurred after that date. Both mineworkers are incapacitated in consequence of industrial injury, and both should be assured of the same measure of just treatment. We must not rest until this injustice is removed.

Improvements in benefits have been obtained through the Mineworkers' Pension Scheme during the year, the pensions of all retired mineworkers having been increased, the majority by 2s. a week.

The minimum lump sum payable under the pension scheme to a widow who draws her pension from the Supplementary Injuries Scheme has been raised to £150, and the Scheme is now extended to cover coke-oven and by-product workers.

Owing to the arduous and hazardous nature of coalmining, it has long been the custom in many countries to give mineworkers special treatment in the matter of pensions.

That was the position in this country when our Scheme was launched. Since then, however, the Transport Scheme, covering all their grades, has been

set up with better benefits than our Scheme, so that a railway porter earns a higher pension than a face-worker in the mining industry.

Quite recently the Minister of Fuel and Power approved a scheme for all manual workers in the electricity industry, giving them still better benefits so that now the mining industry is lagging behind rather than being at the head of the pension schemes.

The Board at the request of the Union have made arrangements for a special actuarial valuation of the fund at April 5th, 1955. The Executive Committee will, therefore, re-examine the whole pension position with a view to drawing up proposals to be put forward to the Board to restore the mining industry to its rightful place in the matter of pensions, including the bringing in of the small number of our members who are still outside the scheme.

We require to build a pensions scheme giving much higher retirement allowances. A man with a lifetime service in the pit should be assured of a scheme pension of £4 a week in his retirement, and a man who must retire due to ill health should, if he has had a reasonable period of service in the industry, be assured of a much higher minimum breakdown pension. To meet these benefits, revenue must be increased. The Board will have to find more money and we ourselves must appreciate the value of our members increasing their contributions as an investment for the years of retirement.

Though our benefits are less than others, so also are our contributions. Part of the Board's increased payment should be assured by their agreeing to extend the number of years during which they will continue the amount of the present employers' deficiency payments. The scheme's assets must be made to enable pension payments to be more in keeping with the service that the recipient gives during his lifetime of service to the industry and to the nation.

Finally, I must refer to the international activities with which our Union is concerned. Our Trade Union Movement in association with the free trade unions of other countries is playing a great part in international activities, particularly with the aim of assisting the development of the young trade union movements in our own colonies and territories. Through the I.C.F.T.U. steps are being taken to improve and develop living standards in the backward areas of the world.

Our Union's interest in this work is direct and practical.

Recently the I.C.F.T.U. decided to expand a Regional Activities Fund, and to appoint a Director of Organisation for this work. Through the Miners' International we have appreciated our responsibilities in this direction. We have also assisted the miners of Northern Rhodesia in their recent struggle. Our Vice-President led a deputation to the mining areas of the Gold Coast in March this year.

Our Union has continued actively to support the International Labour Organisation. Our International, through the I.L.O., has raised many problems affecting the mining areas of the world, and much progress has been made.

At the beginning of last year the publication of the report of the U.N./I.L.O.

Committee on Forced Labour confirmed the existence in some countries of this blot on the conscience of men of goodwill. It revealed forced labour practices as a means of political coercion and economic exploitation. I welcome the decision of the I.L.O. to take this issue under consideration at next year's I.L.O. Conference. I hope it may lead to a new convention outlawing all forced labour practice.

Our Conference will have concluded its labours before the top-level talks by the heads of the Four Great Powers have started in Geneva. These talks are the culmination of significant developments in the relationships of the free nations, one with another, and with the Communist countries. We most earnestly hope that the results of these discussions will be to lessen the tension between East and West, and to bring about a better understanding to enable all the nations to live peacefully side by side. It does not indeed seem vain to hope that the Great Powers can move now towards proposals leading to general disarmament and to ensuring of guarantees that will rid the world of the fear of atomic warfare. The peace of the world may, this year, as a result of these developments be made more secure than at any time since the early 1930s. It seems like a dream, unreal and impossible, but the end is worth the effort. If our great defence programme could be substantially reduced, our resources of manpower and of finance for industrial development would be greatly enlarged, and our contribution to the building up of resources to provide higher living standards in the backward areas of Asia, Africa and Latin America could be substantial and real.