

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

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

CHAIRMAN: Fellow Members, this Annual Conference to which I have pleasure in welcoming you is the forum for discussion over the widest fields on matters concerning the well-being of our 700,000 members and their families. Indeed, in association with the decisions we make concerning our own people we remember that we are also intimately linked with the larger trades union movement at home and in many countries throughout the world. It is at our annual conferences that our problems are hammered out and our possibilities determined. It is here that our aspirations and desires are given expression to, and our requirements and needs emphasised. Here that the policy of the Union is determined by representative delegates appointed to express the views of the men. These conferences are a profound and active form of democracy at work.

In our policymaking we must have the fullest information about the coal industry itself, its importance in the economy of the country and the prospects and possibilities it holds for ensuring staple and continuing employment, and the well-being of those who engaged in it for their livelihood. If there is no future for coal there is no future for Britain! That future will depend upon the nation's willingness to recognise the contribution that miners make by winning coal from the remotest Areas in the depths of the mines.

In recent years the economy of Western Europe has continued to expand and ever-increasing quantities of coal have been needed to meet the demands of this growing industrial machine. In 1954 ten million tons more were required; last year a further 20 million tons were needed. To meet these additional demands imports of coal to Europe from the United States rose from 8½ million tons in 1954 to 21 million tons last year.

Britain has followed this general pattern. Increased demand, and a slight drop in overall production, made it necessary for us to import 11·6 million tons of coal from America and the Continent last year. In this way the gap between production and demand was closed and a further five million tons of coal were added to the country's stocks. The cost to Britain's world trade account for these imports was £73 millions.

This imported coal had to be transported from the dockside to the customers—and this operation added to its final cost. The customer, however, never paid the full price. Whatever the cost of imported coal or its transport charges, the consumer in Britain never paid a penny more than the price charged for British coal of a similar quality. The difference was met by the British coal industry and was a subsidy extracted from the finances of the National Coal Board.

At our Annual Conference last year I estimated that this subsidy would be about £2 10s. on each ton of coal. On the basis of imports of 12 million tons I forecasted that the cost to our industry in 1955 would be in the region of £30 millions. The facts now available show that these estimates were not far from the mark.

Last year the National Coal Board subsidised imported coal to the extent of £2 8s. a ton. The total cost to the industry was £28 million. Since 1947 the cost of supplying imported coal to British customers at home prices has been no less than £41,500,000. This cost has been borne by our industry and is £5 million more than the total deficit of the industry since 1947.

No other coalmining industry, in no other country, carries such a crippling burden upon its back.

In France the difference between the delivery price of American coal and that of home-produced coal is borne by the Government.

In Germany, where the delivery price of American coal is between 20 and 40 DM above that of home-produced coal, the extra cost is borne by the customers. The iron and steel industry, which purchases the coal, operates an equalisation fund so that the extra cost of imported coal is spread out evenly over the individual firms concerned.

But here in Britain the whole burden is placed upon the coalmining industry. This year we have to pay a subsidy of 70s. on every ton of coal imported into the country.

Surely it is not unreasonable or extravagant to demand that the time has come for this millstone to be removed from our necks? Indeed it should never have been put there. The coal imported into Britain is of vital importance to the economy of the country as a whole, and as such it is only reasonable that the extra cost should be borne by the economy as a whole. The Exchequer should pay the subsidy which at the present moment is imposed upon the industry.

The growth of Britain's economy and the need for greater supplies of fuel to keep the wheels of industry turning at a faster pace has turned the thoughts of many people in the direction of fuels other than coal. Oil is seen as a possible alternative and in recent years its use as an industrial fuel in Britain has been growing.

The consumption of petroleum products by this country last year was 10 per cent higher than in 1954. Gas, diesel and oil fuel used was equal to 15 million tons of coal—between five and six million tons more than in 1953. These so-called "black-oils" are used largely for the same purposes as coal, and their increasing use in industry is a sign of the extent to which the change is being made from solid fuel to oil.

To base our industrial machine on oil would be a dangerous proposition. Most of our oil supplies come from the Middle East and political or economic disturbances in that area might turn off the tap and reduce our supplies to a trickle or perhaps stop them altogether.

Other possible alternatives to coal for industrial purposes are natural gases and hydro-electric power. We have little natural gas upon which our economy can count. Hydro-electric schemes are being developed, but it is unlikely that these developments will take place at a rate which will make any significant contribution to our power needs.

If we consider the rate at which the country's fuel needs have grown as modern industry has developed, none of the possible substitutes for coal I

have mentioned present a grave threat to the future of our industry. The fact remains that today 87 per cent of the country's entire fuel and power needs are met by coal.

There is, however, another very important development, which is the harnessing of the power of the atom for industrial purposes.

Recently the machinery was started at Calder Hall, Britain's first nuclear-powered electrical generating station. In a few months' time Calder Hall will be feeding electricity into the national grid and housewives will be cooking their Sunday joints with atomic energy.

This is a startling development and it marks for us in Britain the crossing of the threshold into the atomic age. But, whilst being aware of these mighty possibilities, we must not allow ourselves to soar into the realms of science-fiction fantasy to such an extent that we ignore the realities of the present.

Within the next ten years it is expected that nuclear power stations will provide electricity equivalent to six million tons of coal a year. By 1975 they are expected to provide the equivalent of 40 million tons of coal. This will be a positive contribution to the nation's fuel and power needs, but it will fall far short of what is required if our industrial production is to rise between the 2 to 3 per cent increase a year needed to maintain and expand our economy.

For this century coal will remain Britain's most important source of power. At present, with short time being worked in some sections of industry, the demand for coal is still increasing. This year coke ovens will need an extra three million tons and electricity, having increased its consumption from 15 million tons in 1938 to 43 million tons last year, will also require another 2½ million tons.

Apart from the growing need for coal in Britain during the coming years, I have no doubt that, for the next two or three decades at least, there will be a ready market for coal in Europe. Recently a careful survey made by a Commission of Experts appointed by the O.E.E.C. estimated that the power requirements of Western Europe would grow from the equivalent of 730 million tons in 1955 to 1,200 million tons in 1975.

Looking, then, at the situation in Britain and Western Europe there is no cause for alarm over the future of our coalmining industry. Nuclear power will be able to provide only a fraction of future fuel needs, and coal will remain the basic source of power for many decades.

Some people, captured by the magic spell of the power of the atom, have already written off the British coal industry. This is a dangerous doctrine, for the facts are that we must continue to develop our coal-producing capacity or bear the sorry consequences in the future.

The provision that atomic energy can give to aid industrial production will still leave a very wide gap to be filled. There must be planned development of the uses of our fuel resources which takes account of all the quantities and qualities of solid fuel available.

Recently the Coal Board announced details of its plan to spend £1,000 million—most of which is to be found by the industry itself—on developing

the mines over the next 10 years. This is a step in the right direction for the future economic progress of the country and the standards of life of the people depend largely on an efficient and expanding coalmining industry.

To continue to import coal at the same rate as last year would be a serious drain upon our balance of payments and consequently a danger to our living standards. Only by reconstructing the pits can this drain on our resources be successfully halted. Therefore the Coal Board's amended plan, "Investing in Coal," receives the full support of the miners and, we hope, the support of the nation as a whole.

But plans to reconstruct and develop pits are not the complete answer, for reconstructed mines and new machines also require men. Investment in the pits will be wasted unless we have the men to man the reconstructed industry.

The attractiveness of other employment as compared with mining, which results in large numbers of men leaving the pits, does mean that more must be done to encourage men to remain in this industry. There is an answer to the armchair critics of the mining industry. There are 25,000 vacancies for men urgently needed in the pits. Let them come in and have a basinful.

Since the industry was nationalised nine years ago 587,000 men, about 90 per cent of the present labour force, have left the industry. In 1948, the manpower peak year, 724,000 men were employed; last year the figure had fallen to 704,000. In the last three weeks the industry's manpower has gone down by 2,000.

This situation is not peculiar to Britain; it is the same, and perhaps more serious, in many other countries. In West Germany, where 330,000 work underground in the hard-coal pits, 470,000 men had left the industry in the nine years up to 1954. A leader of the West German Miners' Union told me recently that only 25 per cent of the mechanics and craftsmen undergoing training and apprenticeship in the German mines in 1948 remained there at the present time. In Belgium the situation is such that the coalmining industry depends a good deal on foreign workers.

These international aspects of the mining manpower problems were recognised long ago. In 1945 the Coal Mines Committee of the International Labour Organisation—a body representing governments, employers and workers—made it quite clear that the manning of coalmines throughout the world depended upon the miners being given living standards more attractive than those of other industries. All coal-producing countries were asked to provide miners with first-rate living standards in order to keep their pits working at strength.

In Britain the problem of manpower is being tackled by both the Board and the Union. For our part the Union firmly believes that the important task is to stop the wastage of skilled and experienced men from the industry. Three trained and experienced miners are as valuable to the industry as five new recruits, who require at least two years to enable them to obtain the minimum experience. It is because of this that the wastage of skilled men is such a serious problem and one which demands our attention.

As I have said, last year there were 704,000 men at work in the industry.

But the figure needed to meet current requirements is 725,000. In two years' time this number will grow and 735,000 will be required.

This leads me to re-emphasise what I have already said that still more needs to be done to make the industry attractive. This is not an indictment of the Coal Board. They have not been intractable about our claims for improvements; they have done a good deal in housing and in social and industrial welfare and, where possible they have improved working conditions. But further improvements must be made if the manpower gap is to be closed.

The biggest contribution towards this end would be a reduction in the hours of work. At the present moment daily hours, both underground and on the surface, are longer than they were 30 years ago. If, together with the finalisation of a piecework structure agreement and the removal of the disqualification for bonus of the Five-Day Week Agreement, the industry could begin to reduce hours of work it is certain a great deal of the wastage in manpower would end and would encourage ex-miners to return to the industry.

The Board say that if working hours are reduced without any compensating increase in productivity the present difficulties of the industry would inevitably be increased. It is quite evident that the situation of the nation's present coal needs strengthens their attitude, but in my opinion it is possible to reduce working hours and do it in a way which will still provide the coal. Experience in West Germany proves the case. The hours of work in their pits have been reduced from 8 to 7½ hours; at the same time output per manshift has increased by 34 kilograms.

In order to express our confidence in the outcome of similar measures in Britain I feel it would be worth while to propose to the Board that half the reduction in working hours sought by the Miners' Charter be put into operation as productivity per man-year reaches the 1954 level, and immediately a 1 per cent increase on that output has been achieved the reduced working hours demanded in the Charter be granted in full.

The 1954 level should be easily possible if stoppages arising from disputes were eliminated or substantially reduced. I would assert that the responsibility for avoiding stoppages rests equally on management and men. Both have the task of seeing that the spirit, as well as the letter, of the conciliation machinery is used to bring about a settlement in matters of difference. Stoppages and restrictions cause losses to both sides. Management lose their standing and reputation and the men lose wages. Moreover, men not concerned in the dispute sometimes suffer and the economy is deprived of its badly needed coal.

None of us can gainsay that we have a responsibility to ensure that stoppages be reduced to the minimum, that restrictions are eliminated and attendance improved. A complete fulfilment in these fields would enable the output per man-year, proposed as a basis for the conceding of the seven-hour day underground and the 40-hour week on the surface, to be easily secured.

It is just 30 years ago that we were locked out and called upon to resist the coalowners and a Government who were in an alliance to reduce our wages and increase our hours of work. From spring to autumn we struggled. The

outcome of that grim fight was that two out of every three miners had to put in an extra hour per day and the remaining one-third an extra half hour, and wages standards were cut. The Coal Board and ourselves, with the determination that output shall not suffer, should now repair the action taken by the coalowners and the Government of that day. I am convinced that in return for this belated reparation the economy of the nation would not suffer. Rather would I assert that the output per man employed would not only be maintained but would rise and more men would return to the industry. The Board would then have no grounds for refusing the claim and its progressive concession would, I believe, be capable of adding 12,000 to 15,000 more men to the industry, many of whom would be returning ex-miners.

But wages, hours of work and a decent social environment must be sustained by the highest possible degree of safety and health.

The Coal Mines Committee of the I.L.O. met recently in Istanbul to study the problems of safety in the pits. Decisions were reached to which the industry in all countries must pay earnest attention in order to reduce still further the dangers which exist. Danger, disease, disablement and death are terrible words and they call for the most challenging effort which our intelligence, experience and vigilance can bring to bear to defeat them. The struggles to wrest these misfortunes from the day-to-day occurrences in mining must be our never-ending pursuit. Fatal and serious accidents have dropped compared with before the war, but there can be absolutely no satisfaction and no complacency when the industry claims the lives of over 400 men and disables nearly 1,900 more, sometimes permanently, as it did in 1955. The number of accidents is still far too high. In the autumn of this year the new Mines and Quarries Act is to come into operation. Managements, inspectorate and workmen must use it to make our pits the safest in the world and to reduce accidents to the lowest level possible.

A word must be spoken about the disease which has taken such a toll of our members, the disease of pneumoconiosis on which, since nationalisation, there has been a frontal attack. We can and must achieve the same success with pneumoconiosis as we have with nystagmus.

Some of our members, however, encounter an attendant danger to pneumoconiosis—the danger of tubercular infection. Where this happens a man is likely to be condemned to complete disablement and even death.

We must do what we can to remove this additional danger. Our wives and families may contract tuberculosis. Apart from the danger to them it can be deadly dangerous to husbands or fathers who are already suffering from dust in the lungs. Because tuberculosis can often be effectively detected by X-rays and cured, this union must devote its fullest energy towards campaigning for the diagnosis and cure of tuberculosis, especially in mining areas. The resources available for mass X-ray and treatment should be largely concentrated on areas where the risk is greatest.

I must express concern about the inadequate cover which the Industrial Injuries Scheme provides for diseases which, although they are common amongst the general public, are also due in many cases to special working risks. Chronic bronchitis, emphysema and rheumatism should be eligible for

prescription as industrial diseases so that those of our members concerned can get the higher benefits and disablement pensions which the Industrial Injuries Scheme provides.

Nor should we forget the inadequate level of national insurance benefits. It is quite impossible for a man and his wife to exist today on £3 5s. a week, which is the old age pension and the highest benefit which can be payable under national insurance. Our own Mineworkers' Pension Scheme must immediately provide for increasing pensions by half with a minimum of £1 per week.

Last year I called for the removal of the injustice suffered by many injured workmen receiving workmen's compensation. There were no moral grounds for an unmarried worker to receive 27s. 6d. a week less for an injury received before July 5th, 1948, as compared with a similar injury which occurred after that time.

The Union has expressed its gratitude for the support it has received from the T.U.C., the Parliamentary Labour Party and especially the miners' group of M.P.s in the House as a result of which a Bill is passing through Parliament to provide an additional sum of 17s. 6d. a week for totally disabled workers in receipt of workmen's compensation. It is expected that the first payments will be made in September.

Now something must be done for the partially disabled workers and the latent cases. There are those who because of the short-time working which resulted in lower wages during the period when they had their accident has meant their failure to secure partial compensation, or which in some cases eliminates such a claim altogether. We must not rest until this injustice has been removed.

We as miners form but 4 per cent of the working community of Great Britain, and in association with the other 96 per cent we are concerned about the well-being of the community as a whole. We are concerned, as everybody is, about the ever-increasing rise in the cost of living.

Apart from a brief period during the Korean War more value has been taken out of money in the past 15 months than during any other similar period since 1945. Three Budgets in a twelve month since April, 1955, have allowed the national burden to slide away from the comparatively well-to-do towards workers in the lower wage groups and the poorest sections of the community. Food prices, the very basis of the means of life, have shown the greatest upward trend. Last week bakers in five counties were being advised to charge 1s. for the 8½d. loaf when the subsidy comes off in September.

Monetary controls exercised without discrimination or selectivity on consumer goods and imports, and on industry, whether engaged in export trade or not, creates difficulties over wide fields. Local authorities are finding, because of the increased loans and interest charges, that they must levy higher rates. The increased charges in housing means an increase in rents, and projects planned to benefit the community are being delayed and abandoned on this account. The credit squeeze is responsible for work-people going on short time or in some cases losing their jobs.

The Tory Government has proclaimed its desire for the people in this

country to be a property-owning democracy, but what it says and what it does are two very different things. The voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hand is the hand of Esau. Its actions, and particularly its monetary policy, are destroying every shadow of possibility of workers owning their own houses.

The physical controls which had been established during the war which were continued by the Labour Government for the purpose of postwar reconstruction and the development of the welfare state, were abandoned by the Tory Government. In the interests of Tory political theory, freedom from controls was the Tory election cry. "Set the people free" was the pattern of their philosophy. This philosophy has prevented the Chancellor from controlling expenditure on unnecessary imports and has allowed that unbalance in the terms of trade to imperil our stability.

The national economy has got out of control and the Government must not complain if we as trade unionists repeatedly make plain to them their error. This Government has taken no account of the fact that resources, which are necessary to the national well-being, have been wasted on luxury and unessential capital development.

These are the circumstances and conditions which the Government have allowed to depress and derange the economy, to put too much strain on our balance of payments position and to create anxiety about the value of the pound abroad and as a consequence to increase the cost of living and endanger the standard of life.

The cost of living has risen in Western Europe and in the United States as well as in Britain, but the rise there has been much less and slower than in this country. We pay 40 per cent more for our loaf of bread than when we had a Labour Government, although the price of wheat itself was higher then than it is now. Between 1951 and 1954 a change in our favour in terms of our external trade gave us an advantage of £1,000 million in our balance of payment figure.

What have the Tory Government done with the benefits that accrued? Like the prodigal son, they have wasted their substance. They failed to stabilise prices. They took the deliberate step of squandering these advantages into tax concessions, giving more to those who already have big incomes and giving more to company managements and business concerns. The Tory Government have no one but themselves to blame for the rise in the cost of living and for letting prices run away with themselves.

Can a Government which has done that complain then if the trade union movement refuses to undertake a policy of wage restraint? To enter into a policy of wage restraint without guarantees that prices would remain stable would lower the relative reward of those whose investment in industry and in the national well-being is their labour.

The need for increasing our export trade needs hammering home, for on the success of our efforts depends not only our ability to improve our standard of living but our ability to help the peoples in backward areas to improve theirs. The improvement of the standard of the educational, social and health services which we enjoy depends upon the wealth which we create in this country. But they also depend upon how that wealth is distributed. A success-

ful export programme and a fair share of the national wealth will not be achieved in a free-for-all scramble. That becomes more clear as the present Government blunders from one attempted remedy to another.

Whilst, therefore, the economy requires that we play our full part whatever the complexion of the Government, a free democratic political constitution like ours enables us to change Governments. For the present Government, the writing is on the wall. Many people throughout the country are rising in anger against Tory Government policy that has helped to bring about the economic crisis. "One swallow doesn't make a summer," but we note the pointer in the Tonbridge by-election result. It is obvious that we must work for the return of a Labour Government which will provide the best guarantee for Britain's economic future and for the well-being of the masses of our people. Whether the next General Election is in three years or earlier, we must be ready.