

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

MR. E. JONES (Vice-President) : It is now my pleasant duty to call upon your President, Mr. W. Ernest Jones, O.B.E., to deliver his Presidential Address.

CHAIRMAN : Fellow Members, It is my privilege to welcome you to this Thirteenth Conference of the National Union of Mineworkers.

A hundred years ago, ferment was expressing itself against exploitation,

poverty and injustice in every mining area in Britain. It looked to the combination of the men themselves into Unions to enable their wrongs to be righted.

In the next year or two, we shall be celebrating the centenary of a number of our Areas who, as District Miners' Trade Unions came into being in the late 1850's and early 1860's.

It is just 70 years since the present National Organisation of Miners was being conceived. The seven lean years of the 1880's had eaten into the soul of all pitmen, and poverty and starvation abounded. Ben Pickard writing of events at that time recorded, "In the year 1887 in most of the mining districts, low wages and starvation both in regard to food and clothing ruled. As I proceeded from one mining village to another and saw the destitution and impoverished condition of the people . . . their haggard faces and their thin raiment, convinced me that they were almost on their last legs as far as clothing went, let alone the emaciation which had set in in regard to their bodies." He said his colleagues and himself had agreed to "make a bold effort to do something, whether we won or lost, in seeking to do the right." In this generation, we are achieving our rights. I wish Pickard and the pioneers of his day could see the success of their work, by being present with us in the flesh today.

Thirty years ago in 1927, following the seven months' "lock out" of the preceding year, we were licking our wounds. We were prostrated and humiliated by a cruel economic system. Our hours of work had been increased and our wages severely cut. Arthur Cook had been maligned, threatened and kicked. It would have seemed a long way from the hopelessness of that day to the hopefulness and realisation of this, and we, therefore, wish it were possible for men like Cook to be with us at this 1957 Conference. Doubtless they are with us in spirit. We should remember that our present has stemmed from their past, a movement sustained by that devotion to the common good and to true human values that they displayed.

Early in the operation of the Five-Day Week Agreement, the Union pressed for the removal of the disqualification on the payment of the bonus shift. The conditions surrounding the surrendering of the bonus shift payment were eased by a schedule of substantial reasons for absence, which the Board under pressure had accepted. No satisfaction in the coalfield could be expected until the bonus shift payment had been consolidated into the shift rates or until its disqualification had been completely removed.

My purpose in referring to this issue in our negotiations during the past year is to draw attention to the attitudes in those negotiations. The attitude of the Board to the removal of the disqualification was favourable, but only in the circumstance that output would not fall in consequence. Our attitude was that the fears of the Board were unfounded and that in any event the Board were using the clamant need for coal as a reason for denying not only the bonus shift claim but all the claims in the Charter. The main problem we said was to get into the industry all the men it could usefully and profitably employ. If this were done, the productive capacity of the pits could be effectively realised. We declare with the greatest determination that an inadequate manpower in the pits of Britain must not be used as a means of

requiring just aspirations and fair claims to be set aside, because of the nation's coal requirements.

The strongest opposition of the men to the standstill of six months proposed by the Board on the bonus issue, was that unless we prosecuted the claim with vigour, the other claims in the Charter would in turn be similarly resisted on the grounds of our coal needs.

This raises the issue as to how the Charter is to be realised in the shortest time, when the capital resources and plans of the industry are laid to increase production by a further 20 million tons in the next eight or nine years. Whatever Government is in power (and every mineworker and his family will leave no stone unturned to secure a Labour Government as early as possible) Britain's economy requires to depend to the limit on her coal resources. The mining of the nation's requirements of coal will have to be, in the very nature of our economy, the serious and never ending pre-occupation of any Government or Coal Board. The burden of this great economic need cannot and will not be saddled upon a manpower unequal to the task, nor will such a position be allowed to frustrate the just and reasonable Charter Aims of the British miner.

How then are we trying to avert any temporary frustration of the fulfilment of our aims in this field of recruitment of manpower? The 1956 recession in a number of industries, had resulted in men becoming unemployed. Where it was sought, opportunity was available of employment in our industry. The shift of men into coalmining since the recession has been about 9,000 or $1\frac{1}{4}$ per cent of the personnel employed, but the need is at least for twice this number. I would contend, however, that as a further means of the realisation of our Charter claims we need to encourage recruitment of manpower by at least a further 8,000 or 10,000 men. This would bring the numbers up to 720,000 which is very much below the Union's estimate of requirements in 1948.

In the light of this situation I must refer to the recruitment of Hungarian Refugees in Britain, who have offered themselves for employment in coalmining. Two thousand five hundred of these men, many of them miners, have been trained in British coalmining methods and in basic English, and are available and appealing for work underground. They cost the industry £21,500 per week for they are paid the wages of any British citizen undergoing coalmining training. Only about one-tenth of them have been placed in employment because our Branches have been unwilling to agree at pits where there are vacancies, that they be employed at those pits. It is unnecessary for me to recite the terms of employment for foreign workers made between the Board and the Union. Suffice it to say that whilst those terms have resulted in the non-acceptance of Hungarian Refugees, over 18,000 Poles and European Displaced Persons and other foreign nationals have, since 1947 entered the industry under the same terms, and over 10,000 of these are happily absorbed in it and in our mining community life. It will be a grave indictment against us if our attitude to the admission of Hungarian Refugee miners is persisted in; the great working class movement nationally and internationally will assert that we have lost our passion for international brotherhood. Hungarian Refugees, whose great crime was fighting Soviet

guns and tanks with their bare hands in their own country, must be welcomed at those pits where it is established that British labour is not available to supply manpower needs.

No one has had more to say about apartheid in South Africa or has more bitterly criticised European workers in the Copperbelt for discriminating practices against the Africans in the Mines, than myself. Now the question is asked in the Rhodesian Copperbelt, "What would happen if 45,000 Africans were to claim to work in British mines?" We are accused of industrial apartheid in our British Mineworkers' Trade Union. It throws back into our teeth the assertions and charges we have made against them and in our present situation we have no healthy answer. Idealism expressed in phrases and sentences however poetic or rich in language is worthless unless the purpose they express compels our vigorous pursuit to fulfilment. Our attitude amounts to the negation of the principles of international brotherhood. Let us take the step of rewriting this page in our industrial history and live up to the motto on countless Miners' Branch Banners—"Workers of the World Unite."

Today, July 1st, 1957, is a milestone in our mining progress. From today it becomes no longer permissible for any youth who, unless he has reached his sixteenth birthday or is already in underground employment, to be employed underground. From today onwards he will only be permitted to go underground for training in specially arranged areas.

Last January opportunity was taken to review the first decade of nationalisation in the industry and to take stock of the progress made. I do not propose to comment upon what was said or written at that time. It is too close in our minds to have been forgotten. I must, however, when columnists publish and spew mischievous sentences about the leasing of the industry to private enterprise, take the opportunity of drawing comparisons between what has been achieved in Nationalised Coal Mining in Britain by what has been realised in the coal producing areas of Europe this side of the Iron Curtain, but including Poland.

Thirty years ago under private ownership, a big gap in relative efficiency was being opened up between the British Coalmining Industry and that of the European countries. In 1925, output in this country per manshift though a little behind the Ruhr output, was ahead of Holland and about equal with the Polish output. About a decade later, in 1936, coal output per manshift in these countries had completely outstripped that of Britain. The I.L.O. Committee in 1938, pointed out that productivity increases had been secured of 118 per cent in Holland, 81 per cent in the Ruhr, 73 per cent in Poland and of 50 per cent in Belgium and Czechoslovakia, of 25 per cent in the United States bituminous mines and in France, but of only 10 per cent in Britain. Against this comparative background of our British industry with that of other nations we can assess our coal contribution to the British economy since 1947. By 1936, every European coal producing country had robbed Britain of its productive lead except Belgium and France and these countries had shortened their leeway with us. At that time productivity in Germany was 142 per cent, Holland 149 per cent and Poland 174 per cent of that of Britain per manshift. Now the position is completely reversed as 1956 production facts show. The highest output area in the six countries of the

European Coal and Steel Community is the Saar. It outmatches the output of any other community country! In global output it produces about the same annual production as our West Midlands coalfield, yet the West Midlands output per manshift underground is just in front of the Saar. The global output of France is about equal to that of Yorkshire, but Yorkshire's output per manshift underground is higher than that of France. South Wales produces about the same global output as Belgium, but the output per manshift underground is higher in South Wales. The output of Holland is equal to that of Northumberland, but the output per manshift underground in Northumberland is higher than that of Holland. Scotland, Lancashire, Durham and the East Midlands produce the global output of the Ruhr, yet the production per manshift underground is equal to that of the Ruhr.

Let there be no misunderstanding the fact that the British East Midlands coalfield produces the highest output per manshift of any coal area in the world where total extraction methods are applied.

Gomulka at the Eighth Plenary of the Polish Workers' Party in October last year, said that output per coalminer employed underground in Poland in 1955, measured with that of 1948, had fallen by 36 per cent.

It will be said that the investment programme has been responsible for this change. It has played some part but it must be remembered that many major reconstruction schemes were a number of years getting under way and have not yet reached completion and thus have still to make their contribution. The coal investment programme, be it noted, covers the reconstruction of 80 per cent of the colliery undertakings of the country as well as the sinking and development of new mines. Managements and men alike have made a tremendous contribution to this success.

We can claim Europe's highest outputs and efficiency and can establish beyond doubt that British coal is still in price, by far the cheapest in Europe.

Uneasiness is felt by the present build-up of coal stocks. We have come through what we call the "Coal Winter" with stocks that were built up last summer scarcely being drawn upon. Stocking grounds have been extended and in some instances are as far as 30 miles from the pits. Much of these stocks are of small coal and with the summer again here, we are seeing substantial additions in distributed and undistributed stocks. To put the build-up of undistributed stocks over those of a year ago into terms of days of output they are equal to four and a half days production. This situation can be supported by the continuance of Saturday working for stocks provide an insurance of adequate supplies in the event of a bad winter in 1957-58 and because there is a market for the coal produced. Increased production has provided three million tons over last year's comparative production and a very mild winter has reduced consumption by over two million tons. Moreover, we have further reduced our exports. There can be a market for our stocks, the need for coal in Europe is a manifestation of this. In 1956 the countries of Western Europe increased their imports mostly on a dollar basis cost from 25 million tons in the preceding year to 32 million tons. Any market for coal surpluses that we may have, though subject to the fixing of contracts, ought to be available at ports across the Channel or the North Sea.

The Coal Committee of the O.E.E.C. estimate that "The primary energy requirements of Western Europe including Britain by 1975 (in less than one generation) are likely to amount to 1,200 million equivalent tons of coal," and according to forecasts based on present plans, primary energy production is likely to amount only to 750 million equivalent tons of coal by 1975. It is apparent that industrial and economic expansion will require all the coal that can be produced, leaving a tremendous gap to be filled by oil and nuclear power.

As demand will increase, it is our responsibility to watch the situation carefully and in this regard I would suggest a motto for the Coal Board. It is, "Keep warm the export market especially for the small grades of coal."

Whereas in the 30 years to 1946 there has been no net increase in the rate of fuel consumption, energy needs have risen by no less than 53 million tons per year in the last 10 years in Britain. Thirty million tons of extra coal has also been provided since 1946, but there has remained a developing requirement which has been met by oil. The projected demand as stated, by the Paymaster General will by 1965 rise by a further 50 million tons of coal equivalent, to be met by nuclear power, oil and coal. Coal's contribution is estimated at a further 20 million tons: oil and nuclear power will increasingly fill the gap. But unless fuel needs are planned, the outcome can be serious for the coal industry, for the miners and for the country as a whole.

A drive to increase the amount of coal got by power loaders is taking place and this, whilst increasing the total output of coal, results in a lesser proportion of large coal. Since 1952, the proportion of large coal to the total produced has fallen from 31 per cent to 26 per cent. The need for large coal is responsible for our coal imports. (It should not be forgotten that between 1951 and the end of last year, imported coal cost the Coal Board over £58 million to distribute at inland prices.) In this situation something must be done not only to reduce degradation in production where this is possible, but consumers—especially industrial consumers who take large coal must substitute small sizes of coal for what they are now demanding. Industry which could adopt smaller sizes of coal, or use alternate fuels, could save the large coal demand to the extent of six million tons per year.

Nuclear power will reduce the demand for small coal. Oil fueled installations are being made at undertakings where pulverised fuel and small coal should and must be used. We are most concerned about a situation which can result in surpluses of small coal which whilst having an export potential would be less valuable and indeed harder to market than the larger grades. We must, we do demand a co-ordinated fuel policy, which insists that where oil is to be used it shall supplant more large and less small coal.

Coalmining merits that the miners' reward must be in the van of industrial earnings. We have steadily and realistically raised coalmining standards in wages, conditions, in safety and health and in social environment which must continue to be our purpose. To the extent that changes in our money wages have been compensation for increases in the cost of living, we have not gained, for inflation takes a bit of catching up and increases in the cost of living are only overtaken after periods of reduced commodity value of money. It is far better and in our own interests to demand and support stable prices and the

curb on inflation than to have extra money that provides only the same amount of goods.

The average age of our members in employment is 40½ years. Forty thousand have come upon the Mineworkers' Pension Scheme since 1952 and well over 100,000 will reach retirement within the next 10 years. We should be concerned about the effects of inflation not only upon those of us who are working but upon them also. Ageing men and their wives are now anticipating the sort of retirement they can enter, and with care and frugality are saving shillings and pounds towards brightening their latter days. We have improved the mineworkers' minimum pension from 10s. to 20s., but nearly 25 per cent of the new amount represents the lost commodity value of money due to inflation. Savings for retirement are being "burgled by inflation." Millions of people who put their savings into what is regarded as the safest and best investment for small savers—that is into War Savings Certificates nine or ten years ago, are finding that as they come to maturity and for realisation that whilst a tax free interest of 5s. had been added to each 15s. invested, making £1 in all, that £1 will only buy the commodities and pay for the services that 12s. 6d. would have provided 10 years ago. Inflation has robbed that saving of 38 per cent of its value.

Our policy must be to concern ourselves with "what money will buy" and upon anchoring the provision our people make whilst in work for their retirement, so ensuring security and that freedom from economic care for which they have saved.

The Reports of the Court of Enquiry into the Shipbuilding and Engineering Disputes proposing the setting up of an authoritative and impartial body to conduct an examination of the wider problems of wages policy in an inflationary setting are supported by the Prime Minister who in his recent Stockton speech referred to Government proposals for an impartial national body to advise on wages, prices, profits and allied questions. The Government have consulted the various industrial bodies including the T.U.C. on the proposal. Trades unions cannot accept them. The Government cannot set aside its responsibility for creating an economy which enables unessential investment and unnecessary spending in important sections which are inflationary. A body which would be used to influence control on only one section in the economy cannot be acceptable to our Movement. Moreover the information such a body would provide is already available. Whilst, therefore, the trades unions must face the responsibility that is theirs in helping to curb inflation, we must resist the establishment of a court such as is proposed.

No matter how successful we may be in establishing wellbeing and security on the economic front, security in world affairs is equally or indeed more important. Scientists have given to man the power to destroy himself and the whole human family. The H-bomb will be suicidal in war, and is dangerous in peace—when tested.

At the moment there is a breathing space, since both sides have the H-bomb, and neither can risk using it. It is the first weapon in history which threatens to destroy the leaders and governments of states as well as their ordinary citizens—the politicians as well as the electors. We must use this

breathing space to create a stable basis for lasting peace—to master the problems we otherwise face of the H-bomb.

The greatest need of this mid-twentieth century is disarmament. I believe that if incessant pressure is kept up upon all governments to reach agreement, prospects for disarmament are better now than at any time since the end of the war.

But we are failing to go the full distance if we stop at abolishing the H-bomb. We must continue to press for the reduction and control of conventional weapons for destroying life as well. The Red Army did not need atomic weapons to crush the workers' uprising in Budapest. We must work for the reduction and control of all weapons in all countries.

There are two things that we must try for as a first step. First—H-bomb tests must be ended for they are a grave danger to public health even in peace time. Now the British Government has had its own tests, there can be no excuse for not accepting Labour's proposal for the suspension of tests and making a new attempt at international agreements. This must be done, we must win back as a nation some of the moral prestige we lost at Suez, and by pressing on our first H-bomb tests. A growing public opinion in America in favour of the setting aside of H-bomb tests is demonstrated by the 63 per cent favourable Gallup Poll taken recently in that country. This is a remarkable progressive development in America, for at the time Adlai Stevenson was conducting his campaign for the Presidency; he made the issue a plank in his programme. But only 25 per cent of the Americans at that time gave it support.

The proposals of the Soviet representative at the Disarmament Sub-Committee to abandon tests for two or three years to establish an International Commission and to set up control points, should be accepted without delay in spite of its coming at a time when Russia has completed five H-bomb explosions in 13 days.

Secondly, in 1955, Sir Anthony Eden proposed an area in Central Europe in which inspections should be open to East and West. Hugh Gaitskell elaborated the proposal in 1956. Why does the Prime Minister refuse it now?

In the Middle East there is no chance of stability and settled conditions so long as each of the great powers is pouring arms into the area for its particular clients. Can't something be done to make the Middle East an area for arms control and inspection, as a means of establishing greater confidence there?

There must be no shuffling or double dealing about what must be done. In plain honesty we have to bring pressure upon our own Government to get this policy and action promoted.

What hypocrisy it is for the *Daily Worker* to be organising its "Abandon H-bomb Tests" Demonstration Meeting on July 14th, when it is the mouthpiece of the British Communist Party who at its Easter Conference rejected a resolution appealing to the Soviet Union to show moral leadership to the world by announcing the cessation of all future H-bomb tests.

We must strive to make an early realisation of our Charter possible. A

seven-hour working day stolen from us 31 years ago is ours by right and must now be a priority. Payment for periods of sickness accepted as a principle in a number of industries including our own Coking industry must be provided to mineworkers. Pensions for those men who, having served the industry for 30, 40 and 50 years and who had reached the age of retirement before the day upon which our Mineworkers' Scheme became operative, must be provided. Ten shillings or fifteen shillings a week must be found for these old pitmen, and this union must pledge itself to make this possible at the earliest moment.

To enlarging wellbeing and security at home and to the striving for peace and security and greater happiness throughout the world, this union and its membership must continue to dedicate itself.