

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

MR. S. SCHOFIELD (Vice-President): Fellow Delegates, before I call upon your newly elected President to address you, I want to make an appeal—you may think it is unnecessary—but nevertheless I think it is my duty to make the appeal to you, that Conference delegates on this occasion do the same as they always do on previous occasions and that is

give the President or the presiding Chairman the fullest assistance and co-operation that we know you can give, and we are quite satisfied if you give the same assistance you gave to me and past Presidents and presiding Chairmen we shall finish up with a good Conference.

It is now my very pleasant duty to call upon your newly elected President, Joe Gormley, to address you.

CHAIRMAN: (Mr. J. Gormley, O.B.E., President, National Union of Mineworkers): There is another first on this occasion. It might be the first time a new President has addressed Conference for the first time on his birthday. I am not asking for presents. You can give these later on tonight.

As this is my first address to the Conference as your National President, I will try not to be too controversial, although I firmly believe that out of good discussions on controversial topics, there usually flows progressive ideas.

May I first of all thank those members who voted for me during the recent election, and pledge to them that I will do all in my power to prove to them that their trust was not misplaced. To all the members I want to assure them that I shall carry out the duties of President in such a way as to ensure that all are treated fairly. I will try to emulate the leadership of my predecessor, Sir Sidney Ford, who unfortunately had to retire prematurely owing to ill-health. May I, on behalf of the whole Union, wish him and his good Lady well in the years of his enforced retirement.

During the last decade, particularly since 1958, the Coal Mining Industry has been passing through one of the most difficult periods in its history. We have seen an unprecedented run down, both in productive capacity and manpower, which has affected all sections of our industry, i.e. Pits, Workshops, Offices, etc. Not one section has remained unscathed. This has inevitably resulted in a very great lowering of morale within the workforce, because of the uncertainty of the future, but I believe this attitude is now changing because Britain's energy position has changed dramatically since last Conference. Swinging from the position of excess coal production and large stocks in 1968/69, fuel policy mis-management led to a critical fuel shortage as the winter of 1970/71 approached. The creation of new smokeless zones was halted with many existing orders being lifted and coal imports were allowed, all in an effort to prevent Britain's industry drawing to a halt because of a coal shortage.

The mildest winter in living memory, the power workers' work to rule and the current economic recession eased the position and now that we are in the summer months, stocks of coal are beginning to build up towards a level commensurate with the normal fluctuations in coal demand. But as the figures show, coal consumption is still exceeding production and the N.C.B. is faced with the necessity to expand production. Their aim is to produce 150 million tons by 1975, but already there are signs that this will not be enough as a world wide shortage of oil appears to be becoming permanent and the more modern energy forms (e.g. nuclear energy) fail to come up to expectations.

The N.U.M. has insisted for years that a fuel policy which ignores the coal industry is doomed to failure. Now, under the pressure of the events predicted by the Union, this view is becoming accepted by most fuel economists.

Indeed, even the National Westminster Bank Review (not a Socialist or pro-coal journal!) published in May said, "The possession of coal or natural gas capable of commercial exploitation has suddenly become an important function of economic policy."

"The argument that cheap energy imported from the Middle East oil-producing states was superior to high-cost domestic coal no longer rings true. . . ."

"... Policies based on the prospect of securing continuing supplies of cheap energy from abroad are no longer tenable."

"The fast rundown of the coal industry in the E.E.C. and in Britain is now seen to have been a mistake . . ."

"... So far the seriousness of the world energy position has not been more evident in Britain because of the existence of indigenous supplies of fuel. If these are not used to better effect in the decade ahead the hard facts of the position will be forced on our attention."

Likewise Keith Richardson in the Sunday Times (2/5/71) stated,

"Today the Generating Board is spending money on building oil-fired power stations that must become white elephants: for before their effective life of 25 or 30 years is finished the burning of fuel oil under boilers for crude steam raising will almost certainly be illegal. By the year 2000 we will be fighting to conserve every last drop of oil we can find. . . ."

"Coal will certainly come into its own in the next century: the world's vast reserves of coal are worth perhaps 9000 billion tons of oil, enough to last for generations yet."

The latest reports of the decision of the C.E.G.B. to postpone conversions of Coal-Fired Power Stations to oil burning, is a further indication of the world-wide difficulties being experienced in supplies of energy and backing up our estimations, can only strengthen the position of coal.

So you will see that in the long term the future is a lot brighter for our industry, but we have many problems in the short term which we will have to face.

The results for 1970-71 show us that total consumption of coal fell by 1½ million tons. Although all markets were affected, the domestic market was reduced as a result of competition from oil and natural gas. This may be altered by the most recent trends, although it is claimed by the Board that many markets were lost as a result of threatened coal shortages last winter.

Coal production fell during the year by five million tons to 142 million tons. Although this was a smaller fall in production than the 13 million tons in 1969-70, it does mean that total production has fallen by 28 million tons over the last 3 years.

The stocks of coal have fallen by 5 million tons in 12 months and had it not been for a mild winter and the other outside influences, which I have mentioned previously, this country would have been facing a fuel shortage such as has not been faced since the days of coal rationing. If that had happened, no one in the country could have laid the blame on the Mineworkers. It could only have been placed at the feet of successive

Governments accepting Fuel Policies based on half-baked assumptions from so-called economic experts.

It may be that there will be a shortage of coal this next winter or the winter after; this could depend on the weather, but in my opinion there is only one guarantee against any projected shortage, and that would be a Government statement backing up the Coal Board's plans to increase coal production to above the 150 million tons planned and ensuring markets for that production. Only in this way can they expect Miners to face confidently demands for increased productivity.

Even in the difficult times which we have been facing, productivity has continued to rise in such a way as to be an example to all other British Industry. If they had followed our example the country could not have been facing the economic crisis which is supposed to be surrounding us. Unfortunately they did not, and unfortunately for *our* Industry, the figures for last year are not as progressive as for previous years. If we are to achieve the 150 million tons or more target of the Coal Board, then we must make fuller use of the modern machinery which is being installed in the Pits. We must also press for the introduction of mechanised means of production in all collieries, because I am sure that with all the Mining expertise available throughout the world, machinery can be found and be bought, which can operate successfully in any conditions. To me it is degrading that in the 1970s we are asking miners in Britain to fill 25-30 tons of coal in a shift or remove the debris of a big ripping, all by hand filling. We must continue our pressure in this direction if we are going to encourage the young men of Britain to feel that this is an industry which has a great future and is worth working in.

I know the present manpower trends are favourable, but I am not quite as optimistic as some people, about our ability to attract the right people. Too often have I seen the pattern emerging, whereby the Mining Industry is only able to attract sufficient manpower for its requirements, when either there is a war on (when men are directed to the Pits) or when a general recession is hitting outside industries and causing long dole queues. The latter position now facing the country may be easing our manpower problems.

This inability in normal circumstances to attract manpower in the right numbers should indicate that many people regard mining yet as a dirty, dangerous job, and of course, they are right. So, to combat this feeling, we have to do two things, i.e.

- (a) Create a wage pattern, which makes Miners able to be regarded as the highest paid industrial workers in Britain, and
- (b) Put pressure on the Coal Board to ensure that the best possible working conditions are created.

As far as wages are concerned, we have now finalised an exercise which the Union embarked upon many years ago. A policy was then accepted that we should seek to abolish the piecework systems, which were widespread throughout the Industry, and replace them with a system of Day Wage Rates. We now have all our members being paid wages determined by one of 3 systems, i.e. 1955 Grade Structure, N.P.L.A. and the last one to be accepted, the Third Wage Structure. This

last agreement has taken more than two years to settle, so it must be realised that the Union has met quite a lot of opposition in implementing this National Policy. However, let me say to those Officials and Members of the Union, who like myself, come from Areas, which were steeped in the tradition of piecework and therefore had certain reservations on the matter, that it would be wrong to go back to the previous jungle which then existed, whereby the saying that "soft coal made good colliers" was very appropriate. But there is no reason for the Union to feel that there should never be incentive schemes. I believe we can build upon this Day-Wage Structure incentive schemes to cover such things as Production, Regular Attendance, Good Safety Standards, etc. These sort of incentive schemes could apply to all sections of our members instead of the select few, who used to benefit under the old piecework set-up. Such schemes would have to be dealt with separately from the Normal Annual Wage Settlement and benefits from them paid out at such times as Annual Holidays, Christmas, etc. This would in no way cause unsafe mining practices to be encouraged.

Irrespective of pure wage issues, we have already put claims to the Coal Board on a number of issues including longer holidays, consolidation of Bonus Shift into Shift Rate, 100 per cent protection of earnings, New Concessionary Coal Scheme, increased Shift Allowances, etc. These will all cost money and as a Union we have got to make a priority list. It is not being realistic to imagine that all the dreams and ideals of our members, which are expressed from time to time in resolutions at Annual Conference can be achieved at once, but some claims are long outstanding, and we are well behind many European Countries when we look at Annual Holidays, Retirement Age, etc. We have been behind too long and in the present climate cannot tolerate this position. We must be able to show an example and not always have to be following examples. That is why I welcome within the constitution of the Union, Pressure Groups of all kinds. I welcome them as long as they act within the Rules and do not resort to tactics which can and do lead to Anarchy. The episode of last October when members of the National Executive Committee were physically attacked did nothing for the good name of the Union and such actions should be condemned. We must be adult enough to discuss our disagreements and if necessary Agree to Disagree. Only in that way can we ensure that decisions are arrived at in a true democratic way.

No N.U.M. Presidential Address can ever be made without some reference to the issue of Safety. The health of our members is of paramount importance, and must be regarded as one of the main assets of the Industry. We, as a Union, must always be regarded as the pressure group for better and safer working conditions.

Therefore, to tell you that 124 men were killed and 912 seriously injured in the inclusive period January 1970 to May 1971, is a very sad and painful duty.

We are well aware that tragedy may be defined in physical terms with precision—just as we are aware that the suffering which arises as a consequence of tragedy, knows no bounds. Our heartfelt sympathy, therefore, goes out to all those bereaved as a result of those members who

paid the supreme penalty, and to all those injured, their families and friends.

Whilst of cold comfort to the many just mentioned, the trend in the overall fatal and serious accident rate per 100,000 manshifts worked offers encouragement. This rate is the best yardstick of the Industry's safety performance, and its longer term trend is downward—but we must be dissatisfied with the degree of improvement. I want to lay stress on the need for this Union to cast its eyes across the broad spectrum of safety in a more searching, more critical and more positive fashion than before. We must ensure, that, within the Union's own organisation, mining dangers are confronted with an adequate force of arms. How else can we be really assured that much-needed progress in safety will be made? How else can we fully accept our responsibility to the Membership?

Three broad signposts which point unerringly to greater safety are:—

1. Education and Training of Members.
2. Research and Development.
3. Serious safety inspection.

We must accelerate forward in these directions as an Industry—and the Union must play its full part, by accepting the need to educate more and more members in these issues. This is one of the ways that T.U. Contributions could be deemed as being well spent. It is both sad and bitter to reflect that more than half a century past, the toll of silicosis, among men driving hard-headings in South Wales was first recorded, pneumoconiosis of coal workers was later to be recognised and, indeed, to constitute the greatest medical and social problem in all industry.

It is timely that we should so reflect, for the report on the 1969 Results for the Periodic Chest X-Ray Scheme shows a slowing down in the fall in the prevalence of pneumoconiosis in the last five-year period. This indicates a gradual increase in dust exposure of the miners employed below ground, particularly face workers, and that dust suppression has not kept pace with the increase in productivity. God forbid that there should be an upsurge in this dreadful disease! No coal is worth this much! The health of our men must not be imperilled by conditions of work just for the sake of production. We must not rest until we obliterate from the pits the scourge of silicosis and pneumoconiosis just as we obliterated the former scourge of nystagmus. This is why I welcome very much the N.C.B. National "Combat Dust" Campaign which went under way on the 7/6/71. May it be a huge success and I ask all our members to give full co-operation.

Surely there can be no argument—the signposts to greater safety are those which point to the preservation of good health, also.

At the moment the Union is engaged in a tremendous exercise regarding claims for damages on behalf of many members suffering from pneumoconiosis. This is as a result of what has now become known as the "Pickles" case. This exercise will be very expensive and could cost over £100,000. Here I want to utter a word of caution to the people concerned. Don't build your hopes too high because, as yet, no case has been won or lost in a court room. It is possible that we may lose out on the issue, and no one concerned should imagine it is only a question of

claiming. We are duty bound to carry on, but as I have just said, no one should bank on us being successful.

On the political field, I am sure that no one here needs reminding that for the last 12 months we have once again been governed by a Tory Government.

For the Trade Unionists who in June 1970 either refrained from voting or voted for the Tories, I can only say that I hope you now realise that there is a vast difference in the ideals of the Tories and the Labour Party. The Tory spokesmen, in trying to explain away their inability or their unwillingness to deal with the economic stagnation and the big dole queues, which are with us as a result of their policies, state that they were given a mandate to deal with the undisciplined workers and to weaken the Trade Union Movement. So they create policies which inevitably lead to high unemployment in the hope that a position of 4 people in the queue for every single job would cause the workers to be reluctant to press their just claims for wages and conditions. But, of course, this has not happened. The workers are quite rightly pressing for their share of the cake and in many instances, by one means or another, getting it.

In trying to deal with the Trade Union Movement, the Government are seeking to put on the Statute Book the well-known "Industrial Relations Bill," an unexpurgated copy of the previous White Paper "In Place of Strife." In my opinion, although unlike its predecessor, the Industrial Relations Bill will become law. it will prove to be completely unnecessary and unworkable. Even the Government lawyers confess to not knowing what it is all about, because so many amendments and new clauses have been added to the original Bill, during Committee Stage, by the time it gets through the House of Lords, we shall have a very much altered Bill. The National Executive Committee, after discussing this Bill, decided to support the T.U.C. general line, advocating non-co-operation in implementation of the Bill and a policy of non-registration or de-registration. With these decisions I fully concur, and I do not want to say too much on this, as we shall be discussing a resolution from the N.E.C. on this matter during the week. However, on de-registration, I support this for more than the pure ideological arguments that have been put forward. I believe that if we were registered as a National Union and had to comply with Rules laid down by the Registrar, it could lead to big conflicts with Constituent Bodies and even Branches of the Union, which are registered at the moment in their own right. But of course, because there are so many Unions who have members on our fringe and who may view these issues differently, we must keep our options open. It is possible that these Unions may decide to register and use that position to try to organise certain sections of our members. Therefore, it is right that we should de-register immediately the Bill becomes law. This would put us in the proper position as far as the T.U.C. is concerned, but because the T.U.C. cannot force all Trade Unions to accept this, we must be in a position if it ever becomes necessary, to apply for registration. I sincerely hope it never comes to this because the only way to defeat the Tory philosophy is for the whole Trade Union Movement to stand united.

It is just as important for this great Trade Union to stand united in facing the problems which will inevitably face us as a result of our decision to oppose the Bill.

The other burning issue at the moment is, of course, our application to join the Common Market. Up to now, the N.U.M. has supported the position of the Labour Party, to wait and see the conditions which can be obtained before deciding for or against. Again we have a resolution to be discussed at this Conference, which would decide future N.U.M. policy and therefore, without wishing to influence the vote one way or another, I can only indicate that I have been involved in discussions with representatives of both the Trade Unions and the Social Democratic Parties of the E.E.C., and my own view, which was previously non-committal on this issue, has hardened quite a lot.

I see Britain as a member of a different Economic Unit than the narrow one, which creates the Six at the moment. I am sure that the British Labour Party will do more good aligned with the strong Labour Parties in such countries as Sweden, Norway, Finland, etc., than, for example, the French Labour Parties, although it must be admitted that the German Democratic Labour Party, along with the British Labour Party, would make a big impact on European politics. Therefore, what is really needed is a wider vision of Europe, rather than the narrow one shown at the moment by the Common Market Group. It needs the whole of Europe, East and West, to be involved in one great Common Economic Unit, which could be a real power in creating peace and stability in the world.

As for future policies of the Trade Unions and the British Labour Party, I as an activist in both, never cease to wonder how the Tories keep getting back to power. With the membership of Unions affiliated to the Party, their wives and families, plus Labour Party supporters in those Trade Unions, which are not yet affiliated, we have a built-in Supporters Club big enough to win any election and to guarantee a continuance of Government by a Political Party which was formed in order that the ideals and aspirations of the Trade Union Movement, could become realities by political action.

To try to examine as to why the Tories keep being returned after 5 or 6 years of Labour Rule, one has to look back and examine the conduct of Government when we were in Office. In my view (and this has been expressed time after time at meetings of the N.E.C. of the Party) the various Labour Governments, whilst trying to introduce Social Policies, have found themselves hamstrung by the pernicious economic and financial systems which have governed this country for decades. A structure which was created by the Whigs and the Tories to benefit their supporters. The system has always been successful in doing just that. But this system does not help to fulfil the desires of Trade Unionists or workers in general. But the Labour Government tried to make this system work, instead of trying to alter the whole economic system. We will never be able to fully satisfy the desires of the people of Britain who support the Labour Party as long as we perpetuate a system whereby some hidden people can juggle the financial pursestrings and cause the Government to have to say "No" to a very worthwhile Socialist Policy.

It is not very much use creating a strong Balance of Payments, if in order to achieve this you sour your own supporters on the way. This is where I believe the last Labour Government failed. In their desires to create a strong financial position, they adopted policies which created unemployment and they decided to try to have a showdown with their own supporters, the Trade Unions. Many of us warned them of the consequences of their actions which were creating a split in the movement and I for one will never forgive some of the people involved. For in my opinion they handed the Government of this country to the Tories on a plate.

So, what do we do about it? We must be determined that at the first possible date we will get shut of the Tories and return a Labour Government, which is committed to govern in such a way as to be seen as a Socialist Government, which can and will ensure continuity of Labour control. We must be determined that the next Labour Government will be seen as a Government for the workers of Britain, a Government whose policy will be to smash the financial control which the City holds at the moment. If we do that the Tories can never again rise from the ashes.

So, to do all this, I believe that the Trade Union Movement have got a big responsibility. Instead of being passive and being regarded just as a means of finance to the Party, we have got to be the activists also at all levels. We have to spend more of our finances in the training of more and more of our members, who should first of all be steeped in the meaning of Trade Unionism, so as to enable them to be elected to the House of Commons, and in such a way as to be seen to be of Ministerial material. I shall never rest content until it can be shown that the whole of the Cabinet in some future Labour Government started their careers in the ranks of the Trade Union Movement.

The language of Socialism is in my view the language of the Trade Union Movement and there must be a complete marrying of the so-called two wings of the Movement. We must, in the future, be determined that all factions in our Party are completely welded. When we do that, I am convinced that Britain will be ruled for decades by a Party which truly believes in people, which by its actions will prove an example to the rest of the world, be once again a strong voice in world affairs and an advocate for peace throughout the world. Without this our hopes and aspirations for our children and our children's children will be of no avail and therefore we, as Trade Unionists, must be determined that peace throughout the whole world is worth fighting for politically.