

## PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

MR. S. SCHOFIELD (Vice-President): Ladies and gentlemen, fellow delegates, it is now my pleasant duty to call upon your President to deliver his Presidential Address. Mr. Joe Gormley, our President.

CHAIRMAN (Mr. J. Gormley, O.B.E.): The difficulty of writing an address at this particular time is that the things you want to say may be out of date before you have a chance to say them.

In this speech I have deliberately not included questions of statistics or percentages; as I believe these are often misinterpreted. So you will find a speech completely free of these.

Twelve months ago I made my first Presidential Address, and now I realise that for many years I shall be able to look back nostalgically to that occasion. For, because it was the first, the members and the Delegates were always willing to be a little easier, and think that the promises contained in the speech can be taken with a pinch of salt. They are always a little kinder to a new man.

But, of course, in the twelve months since that speech quite a lot has happened, which has seen some of those promises fulfilled. For instance, we have won the biggest single wage increase ever known in the history of the National Union and the Industry. We have also got extra holidays, recognition of the Adult Rate at the age of eighteen years and have also seen the Bonus Shift incorporated into the Shift Rate. This single issue means that many of our members have had another wage increase since the big one. I refer, of course, to those of our members who work overtime, and although I do not propagate the working of overtime, we have got to be realistic and admit that some overtime is necessary and a lot of it worked. So, as I say, these of our members have had a second bite of the cherry.

What about the main wage increase? Well, this speech will give me as your President the first opportunity to say to all the members and their wives, congratulations on the solidarity which you showed to your leaders. This solidarity was what really won the battle; the members were magnificent, in fact in some instances they were too solid, for the liking of the N.E.C. and I refer, of course, to the question of Safety Men and Clerical Staff which we wanted to work to process wages, etc. But here let me be honest. I didn't worry too much, for it was better being too solid rather than the other way round. The battle was won and as a Union we never broke the rules. We kept strictly to the law and here I must make the claim, irrespective of many statements which have been made since, that the picketing exercise was and still is completely legal. If there were isolated incidents of violence being used, it did not make the whole exercise illegal. Often the violence only arose as a result of intimidation of the pickets. It was a magnificent exercise, which went off like a well drilled Army manoeuvre, without the need of too many generals. I can not praise the members too much for the tremendous way they responded and for the way they handled themselves in the vast majority of the different facets of the work involved. Their conduct enabled us to keep the support of the Public and the Press in general. Never in my lifetime

have I seen an exercise such as ours supported so fully by the mass media, that is the Public, the Press, Television in many ways and of course the rest of the Trade Union and Labour Movements. I want to make particular reference here to the support given to us by the Railway Unions and the Transport and General Workers' Union, whose members were magnificent in respecting our picket lines. Without this support, the battle would have been a lot longer and more bitter and the outcome not as certain. Therefore we must thank them all for their support and include those hundreds of people who showed such friendship to our members on the picket lines.

But leadership carries with it responsibilities. To lead your members into a strike is one thing, but you have got to know when to lead them back. On this occasion I am glad to say that the leadership came from the top, i.e. the National Executive Committee. They were completely united all the way up to the day of the publication of the Wilberforce Report. I realised on that day that the N.E.C. would be bound to go to the members with some form of a recommendation. I thank the N.E.C. for their patience on that day, whilst the three National Officials were negotiating with the N.C.B., the Minister and the Prime Minister, in an attempt to reach a position where the N.E.C. could make a unanimous decision to recommend acceptance. Unfortunately, for the first time during the campaign, we did not get unanimity, but a majority decision to recommend acceptance. I believe the overwhelming ballot vote of the members which accepted the N.E.C.'s recommendation, a vote of approximately 28 to 1, completely vindicated the majority of the N.E.C., who saw the wisdom of telling the members that this was the time to go back. My own view is that if we had not decided the issue on that day, we would have lost the full support we had been enjoying. As it was our members went back to work honourably having won a great victory, proving once again that unity is strength.

But in talking about unity, for God's sake don't let us give the impression to the public and to our customers that we believe as a Union, that the only way to solve our problems is by the use of the strike weapon. The right to withdraw our labour is a fundamental right for every worker in a free and democratic society, but being a member of a free society also carries with it the responsibility to listen to the other person's point of view. I do not believe in unity at the expense of nullifying freedom of speech, but I expect that having made a decision as a result of free discussion, that decision stands until another decision changes it. That is why I would like us seriously to consider one of the implications of the Wilberforce Enquiry. Here we had a Committee who, although having been set up by the Government, went about their job completely independently from pressures of all kinds. From talks I have had since with members of the Enquiry team, they were subjected to all kinds of pressures from the extreme right to the extreme left, but they ignored them all.

They judged the case on its merits and the justification of our case was the only deciding factor as far as they were concerned, and it was on that basis alone that they had given their judgement. Now this should indicate

to us that it is possible to find people of integrity who would be willing to adjudicate on any issue completely independent from pressures, whether from Government or any other source. That being the case I think we should examine very carefully our own conciliation machinery to see if there is anything wrong with it. If there is, let us put it right. If we get ours functioning properly, then we can tell the Government or anyone else that we need no outside interference in dealing with our problem. We are bound, in my opinion, to start getting back the faith we once had in arbitration, the faith which was destroyed many years ago by Government interference.

This is why I welcomed the decision of the Labour Party N.E.C. and the members of the Shadow Cabinet, that one of the priorities of the next Labour Government will be to repeal the iniquitous Bill which this Tory Government introduced in order, as they said, to bring some sense into Industrial Relations. We even have Ministers still bragging that the Act is working successfully. God help Britain if they ever get the feeling that it is not working successfully. Never in all my lifetime have I seen such a lawyers' paradise.

Theirs is one Trade Union that has no fear of any redundancy problems, for we now have the position where the whole laws of the land are being discredited with one Court's decision being changed overnight, because it can be seen that politically the first decision would embarrass the Government. For the Government to say that they have no knowledge of these legal moves, which fortunately get them off the hook, is too ludicrous for words. We have recently had the position where the Chief Appeal Judge has had to go into the public press to explain to the country why certain legal decisions were made and trying to prove to the country that there had been no Government interference. This is bound to cause us a lot of misgiving and in my opinion it would be a lot more honest of the Government to admit that this piece of legislation has been a complete and miserable failure as we in the Trade Union Movement warned both this and the previous Government that it would be. You can not legislate for good Human Relations, which is what Industrial Relations is all about. They ought to immediately forget the whole sorry exercise, bury this Act, which has done more to create bad relations between workers and employers than any single issue this century. If they feel they cannot do this, then it is their duty to go to the country. Let them test the people of Britain on their record. But let me add a word or two of caution, not only to my own members, but to all other Trade Unionists, that it is not sufficient to get the Tories out; we must get Labour in. We must not allow the Tories to get off the hook by forcing them to the country on the wrong premise. Their overall record is appalling on such things as unemployment, housing, finance, rising prices, tax handouts to their friends, attacks on the Social Security Services, their determination to take us into the Common Market whether the majority of the people of Britain support the idea or not, along with the chaos arising from the Bill for Bad Industrial Relations which I have just mentioned are sufficient of a platform for our movement to lambast the Tory Government and defeat them whenever they decide to go to the country. We must not allow them

to provoke our Trade Union Movement into taking action which they could use as an exercise for an Election on the narrow issue of Law and Order. I hope the delegates have taken notice of the recent speeches being made by the Prime Minister and many other Ministers on this question of the rule of law and why they must uphold the rule of the laws. They are unscrupulous politicians and would be willing to use any excuse to get an extension of time.

We must be determined that whenever the Election is called, the whole of the Trade Union Movement is completely unified in its determination to elect a Labour Government dedicated to the Socialist Principles and Policies as determined from time to time at the National Conference. Here we should say to our colleagues in the House of Commons, that although we respect freedom of speech and thoughts, and would never seek to destroy that position, they have a responsibility to the Movement. Their main task at the moment, because of all the chaos around us, should be to create a situation where the Government are forced to go to the country. I don't care how strong a personal view may be, no Labour M.P. should allow himself to be used in such a way as to be seen to be protecting a Tory Government's majority on important issues, for to do so is depriving us of the opportunity sooner rather than later of changing the political scene through the Ballot Box.

But whatever the political scene, we have to deal with the problems of our industry, and here let me say immediately that unlike many prophets of doom, I do not forecast that the recent wage settlement will automatically mean the loss of thousands of jobs. Some of our biggest critics you usually find are amongst the ranks of those who have left the industry of their own accord. It would be for the better if they could keep quiet and allow those still in the Industry to try to solve the problems.

I take this more optimistic view, because I believe that what we as a Union and the Coal Industry in general have been saying for the last decade, is at last beginning to sink in. Experts are now forecasting that at the present rate of usage of the known sources of oil and gas, a serious world shortage could arise by the year 2000, and this is not taking into account the expected increased development in the under-developed countries. We have been warning people for years that there will come a time when regrets will be the order of the day at the number of pits which have been closed resulting in the sterilisation of millions and millions of tons of coal. This pit closure problem arose as a result of different governments having only half-baked approaches to a national fuel policy and we would hope that the next Labour Government would be more forward thinking than any we have had up to now.

I know that there have been recent optimistic estimates that at that time, i.e. year 2000, nuclear energy would be responsible for producing between 50% and 75% of electricity needs, but many of us realise that such estimates are pipe dreams if we take into account the results of past estimates of nuclear expansion and costs. No responsible Government could base its Fuel Policy on such flimsy estimates.

What this country needs is an integrated fuel policy maximising our indigenous fuel supplies, such as:—

- (a) Coal which has known reserves for more than another 100 years;
- (b) North Sea Gas and Oil, which would last, according to reports, for about 20-25 years; and
- (c) Nuclear Energy and then the residue of our energy needs, to be filled by importations of fuel from other sources.

This political decision, if made, would make us more independent for fuel supplies, a position which surely ought to be welcomed not only by all the population of Britain, but also by the industry and Government. This is another reason for having Ministers we can talk to in our own language, who will also be getting their guidance from Conference decisions which we as a Union will have played a part in getting formulated.

At the moment we as a Union are having periodic discussions with the Minister as well as participating in the Fuel and Power Committee of the T.U.C., who are working to try to formulate a T.U.C. policy on Fuel and Power which is acceptable to the Unions involved and the Government and Industry in general.

We are also working in co-operation with the Coal Board, so that we as an industry can go forward united to argue with Ministers or anyone else concerned, a jointly agreed Energy Policy for Britain, which would be based on maximising the use of coal. But to be accepted seriously, we have some repair work to do. To get such a policy even taken seriously, we have to be able to guarantee as far as possible, supplies of coal to the customers. This to me is eminently necessary if we are ever going to have a position of stability created in our industry, a position which our members must have, if their morale is to remain high. This guarantee to the consumers can be achieved in many ways, i.e.:—

- (a) Payment of good wages in order to attract the right type of manpower (we went some way along this path as a result of the recent wages settlement);
- (b) Increased productivity from the very expensive and technically advanced machines which have been installed in the pits (we have already agreed to co-operate with the N.C.B. in a campaign for increased productivity);
- (c) By pressing for more and more mechanisation, particularly at Face Ends and Ripping Lips, the notorious areas of very arduous work even yet, in this technologically advanced age; and
- (d) By trying if it is at all humanly possible to settle our disagreements around the Conference Table, without being forced as we were this year to use the ultimate weapon.

These four things jointly will get us customers and retain them. Without customers for coal there is no need for a Coal Industry, and we must never forget that irrespective of the optimistic note, which I struck a little earlier we still have a lot of opponents around, not only from other sources of energy, but also a lot of the people of Britain who are responsible for making decisions about fuel uses, and also many of the general public, who although they supported us during our strike, nevertheless are not buying coal, which is the important thing. Many of

them take the view, that because mining is still a dirty and dangerous job, the less the number of miners working in the pits the better. They have not as yet realised that the Union's arguments are about what is good for Britain and not about whether we have more and more members.

But as I have said on many occasions it is the Union's task, whatever the size of the membership, to seek at all times to increase the real living standards of those members, to ensure they work in the best and safest conditions possible and to help them as far as we can with the difficult problems facing them and their families when either through sickness, injury or age, they can no longer work. To this end, I would like to put to Conference one or two ways which the Union could employ in order to raise the level of real wages, outside the more accepted practice of applying every year for an increase which, many years has barely matched the cost of living increase. We could go forward for threshold or cost of living clauses to be written into our Agreements to cover that sort of thing automatically, but along with that, we could get deals for our members in many ways. For example, if it is necessary, as I have quoted earlier for our members to increase productivity, we must devise some scheme to be applied to all our members, so that as productivity rises, bonuses could be paid periodically. We can seek also bonuses for good attendance, years of service and the most important of all in my opinion, a change in the Shift Work payments. We have at the moment a payment of a tanner per hour between the hours of 8.00 p.m.—6.00 a.m. This to me is now an archaic approach to this issue. We are an industry which has always had a lot of workers involved in shift work, i.e., Double, Triple and sometimes Multi Shifting, and if we are to get the real benefits from the machinery I mentioned earlier it is inevitable that the Board may want to extend shift working, and we must find some way of encouraging the men to accept this fact. Now as a miner who experienced a lot of shift work in my thirty years as an active miner, I know and understand the reluctance of men to work afternoons and nights. I know, too, how a man's system is affected when week in and week out his whole pattern of life has to change. For instance, his meal times, sleeping times and social activities are different week after week and it is this effect of shift work on a man's whole life pattern which we have to pay more attention to and seek the proper compensation for. I know some industries such as glass making where this already applies. A pattern which I would like to see us press for would be:—

- (a) Basic Rates as negotiated for men conditioned to a single shift.
- (b) Basic Rate and a percentage, for every shift worked by a man recognised as a Double Shift worker.
- (c) Basic Rate plus a bigger percentage for every shift worked by a man recognised as a Triple or Multi-Shift Worker.

This then would be a pattern of wages which would be compensation in my opinion not only for loss of social life, but also for the upset created to a man's life system. These and many other ideas which I am sure our members have in mind could be utilised to increase the real value of wages instead of having to rely on an annual confrontation on wages which can

too often these days be expressed in percentage terms and which can be so misleading, for I have always argued that 100% of nothing is still nothing, whereas 10% of a big wage means a big amount. I hope, therefore, by bringing these ideas out that the members may start believing that real living standards can be increased by a lot of other means than by having Conference Resolutions being carried, forcing the Union to seek an annual increase in wages to the exclusion of all other issues.

There is another issue upon which I would like to express an opinion. We have talked glibly for years about workers' participation or workers' control and usually these are just taken as glib phrases, but I believe the time is now ripe for us to seek to be involved more and more in the management of this industry of ours. I know we have joint consultative committees at all levels, set up and functioning, but I think we have a bigger task as a Union and that is to make sure that when we are discussing problems with the Board, we can seek and receive all the information which is contained within the books of the industry in order that we can go into our discussions fully armed. I think we have got to be involved more and more in the decision making of this great industry of ours because once decisions are made, they often become irrevocable. If we can be seen to be participating in the running of the industry, I feel sure we will make a better contribution than we have done up to now in ensuring a more secure future for our members. I know this may be a little unpalatable for some of our members, both for those who believe we should be completely divorced from management and also those members who think we should go the whole hog and take over full management, but I believe there is a happy medium between both of those thoughts and, of course, I have suggested that which seems to me to be a happy medium although I realise that we may perhaps have to participate in many unpopular decisions. But that, after all, is what responsibility is all about and we have got to be seen as responsible people.

As I said last year, no Presidential Address could or should ignore the question of Safety in the Industry. Even the Wilberforce Enquiry team said, and I quote: "We know of no other occupation where there is such a combination of danger, health, hazard and discomfort in working conditions."

The recent appalling disaster in the Wankie Colliery in Rhodesia, resulting in the death of over 400 miners, should indicate to us that Coal Mining still has a long way to go before it can be regarded as a safe industry. We for our part cannot be complacent. There are still far too many accidents happening causing serious injury and death to our members. Every one single accident is not only a statistic. It is to some family a tragic occurrence, needing special help on most occasions. That is why I am not quoting statistics. We have got constantly to keep pressurising our members who can make such a collective contribution to Pit Safety. We must never indicate that safety is only a managerial responsibility, because our members should realise that on an average there are 600 members of the Union to every colliery Manager. Now that means that not only are there 600 more chances of Union members being affected by accidents, but we have 600 pairs of eyes to 1 with which to

notice unsafe mining practices and through our organisations and various committees reporting them and ensuring the matter is rectified. It is only by our members being fully involved even if this means self-criticism amongst the men, that we shall be able to show the right trends in accidents.

We also can express no satisfaction in the trends for the incidence of Pneumoconiosis. I know that for many years there was a gradual fall in the number of new cases recorded but this last two years the fall has stopped and the line has flattened out. This may be the result of the big increase in mechanisation over the last few years and if so it proves what many of us fear, that is that although a tremendous amount of time and energy is being spent on research into ways and means of dealing with the dust problem associated with increased mechanisation, we are still a long way from solving the problem. We also have another big problem which is the subject of a lot of research which is not yet being very successful and that is the problem of outbursts of gas and coal such as the one which resulted in fatalities at Cynheidre Colliery in South Wales. Also the tragedy I previously mentioned in Rhodesia should indicate that we do not yet know half enough about the behaviour of methane in Coal Mining and, therefore, we as an organisation, must not content ourselves with being a pressure group within our own country. We must be a pressure group on the international field. That was why I encouraged and welcomed the decision of the N.E.C. to approach all the Unions in all Coal Mining countries of the world with a view to finding out if possible their approaches to research into safety problems with a view to seeing whether by pooling the efforts we would be able as soon as possible to introduce new systems which would result in mining becoming a safer industry to work in.

The problems of miners and the mining industry know no ideological boundaries and that is why the National Union of Mineworkers believes in personal dialogue with miners' representatives from any country of the world. The problems are no different, but the approach to solving them may be different and, therefore, if we can study one another's approach, then it is possible by joint consultation and co-operation that we may be able to solve many of the major problems a little sooner.

Let us tackle this task with the same determination with which we tackled the wage problem earlier in the year.

On welfare there is always a problem. Many supplementary schemes, particularly the Miners' Pension are such that if we are not careful, whenever we get an increase, it means that many members get no actual benefit; all that it means is that the Pension Fund subsidises the State. This is because the amount disregarded by the State is not high enough, and although we have been having discussions with Ministers and the T.U.C. we have not yet been able to increase that disregard. Nevertheless, at the time of writing this address we are still in active discussion with the Board for increases in the Miners' Pension, Sick Pay and Redundancy Pay Schemes. We were able during the last twelve months to get an increase in the lump sum payable on compulsory retirement at 65 years from £200 to £300, an increase in the lump sum payable under the Mineworkers'

Special Fatal Accident Scheme to a maximum of £300 and a new and improved Over 55's Scheme, including an annual cost of living increase and the removal of various long-standing anomalies. But as a Socialist I would hope that we never depart from our long-term objective which is to guarantee every worker that when he or she retires or has to finish work for any cause, be it sickness, injury or unemployment, they should be able to enjoy the same standard of living or better than that which they were enjoying before they finished work and that this should be a State responsibility.

Because of what I have just said, our possible entry into membership of the Common Market will create very big problems for our industry, although the N.C.B. indicate that in their opinion it could create big opportunities for us as far as trade is concerned. I am not going to argue the political aspects of entry into the E.E.C.; our position as a Union is known, but we have got to be realistic, for if the politicians allow us to be taken into membership, then unlike any other industries, the British Coal and Steel Industries become immediate members of the European Coal and Steel Community on the 1st January, 1973. The problem of Social Benefits is approached differently in that body than we deal with it in this country. Also, the question of energy patterns, imports, etc., are being and will continue to be made by people who have no connections with our own industry. In such circumstances, the leadership of the N.U.M. cannot be like ostriches and think that if we put our heads in the sand, these possible problems will go away. They will not and we have to be prepared to meet the possibility that we may become a part of the E.C.S.C. Therefore, we are having discussions with Miners' Trade Union representatives of the European countries with a view to arming ourselves with the knowledge as to how we shall be affected as a result of our becoming part of the European Coal and Steel Community. The N.E.C. is arranging for meetings of our Union's experts with their counterparts in the West German Mineworkers' Union to exchange the knowledge regarding Social Security, Energy Policy, Wages Policies, Safety, etc., and no doubt they will have to meet other representatives of our other European colleagues with whom we are associated in the Miners' International.

At an early part of my speech, I made reference to politics and to the need for an early change of government, but because of what I have said about the international aspect of the N.U.M. and the need for exchanging ideas on research, etc., I don't think that it will be sufficient to change the Government to be able to guarantee that any better standard of living we are able to achieve will not be interrupted as a result of International dispute which may cause our country to get involved. There are certain areas of the world where conflict could arise and on a personal basis I would like to make some comment. Firstly, on Vietnam, this long running sore. I think it is time for us to demand that all outside troops be withdrawn from South Vietnam and the Government of that country be allowed to be decided democratically by the people of the country. It is no business of any other country what kind of a government may be elected. Let them decide for themselves. Already too many innocent

victims have been slaughtered both by the fighting in South Vietnam and the bombing of North Vietnam, too many for the world to tolerate the continuation of the war because of ideological differences. Secondly, in the Middle East, the problem of Israel and the Arab countries can only be decided by negotiations between the Israelis and the Arabs. It will not be solved either in Moscow, Washington or even in New York at the United Nations. It will be solved by the two parties or not at all. For my part, I think it is completely unrealistic for any body of people to pretend that Israel does not exist. It is a fact and it will not be altered because 100 million Arabs face 3 to 4 million Israelis.

It is also just as unrealistic for people to pretend that the State of East Germany does not exist. It does exist and will continue to exist whatever the pressures. That is why we should welcome the initiatives of Willy Brandt which have created the agreements, firstly, on access by West Germans to West Berlin and by West Berliners to East Berlin and the G.D.R. in general; secondly, regulating traffic between the two German States. These have now come into force by the ratification of the two treaties between West Germany, Russia and Poland, which guaranteed boundaries amongst a lot of other things such as trade agreements. I hope before long the German Democratic Republic will be officially recognised by the world. It is in this new climate which exists in mid-Europe that we should look very seriously at the suggested European Security Conference. From my talks with many Polish representatives, I get the feeling that they genuinely wish to get away from the feeling of insecurity which they have lived with for decades. They give me the impression that their moves are not propaganda moves but are an earnest desire to get agreements on such things as boundary guarantees, Trade and Co-operation Agreements and acceptance of the fact that different ideologies govern the different countries. The problem of disarmament must not be allowed to clog up such a conference, but could be the subject of another special Conference which could go on for months.

Therefore, I believe this great Union should take a leading part in getting our Labour and Trade Union Movement to agree to press for such a Conference as soon as possible and to cut to the minimum the arguments about the Agenda.

Now members of the N.U.M. may ask why? How will this affect us? I answer in this way. It is no use the Union fighting for better standards of living or better working conditions unless we can guarantee that our members will be allowed to enjoy them and, therefore, just as I believe we can create better standards for our members by continual dialogue with other Miners' Trade Unions irrespective of ideologies, I firmly believe that better prospects for continued world peace will exist if the various countries, whatever their political ideologies can agree to sit together round a communal table to discuss human problems which face them all, resolve to try to help one another in solving those problems and agree on the right of the other man to exist and think for himself.

Only then shall I feel that this will be a happier world, a world in which our members and their children and their children's children will be able to live a full and happy life.