

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

MR. S. SCHOFIELD (Vice-President): Ladies and gentlemen and fellow delegates, it is my privilege once again to call upon our President to deliver his Presidential Address. I would ask delegates to be as kind to Joe during his speech as they have been in the past. Mr. Joe Gormley, your President.

CHAIRMAN (Mr. J. Gormley, O. B. E.): If I was reading the Lesson to-day, I would use as a heading "The Tide has turned, so let's make the best use of it", because in the last decade, particularly during the last fifteen years, the N. U. M. has been arguing the need for an integrated fuel policy, which would maximise the use of our own indigenous fuels, such as coal, which has a known reserve for more than another 100 years, the new finds of North Sea gas and oil, which would, according to all the estimated reports, last for between twenty to twenty five years — and then nuclear energy, with the assumption that the residue of our energy needs would be filled by importations of fuel from other outside sources.

We have, over these years, finalised our policy on the understanding that we as a Union believed that it would be political and economic suicide for a country such as Britain not to maximise its own supplies of energy and allow a situation to be created where the majority of the industries of Britain are supplied with energy, which has to be imported from politically unstable parts of the world. As a small industrial country—an island—we have always felt it was crucial that the N. U. M. should be able to convince other trade unionists that it was in their interests also that supplies of energy for their industries were on a more secure basis than that of imported sources. To this end, we had numerous resolutions submitted both to the T. U. C. and the Labour Party Conferences and I am happy to say that during this last year we have finally reached a position where there has been a common ground for agreement in the T. U. C. on a statement of energy policy. This was undertaken by a Sub-Committee of the T. U. C. upon which all the ten Unions involved in the energy industries were represented. As I have just said, we have now issued a Joint Statement, which has been accepted by the General Council and is a result of much research by the T. U. C. into the energy position in the world. Here I quote from the T. U. C. document:

"An explicit fuel and power policy for the next decade is necessary because mistaken decisions in the fuel and power sector would lead within a few decades, to enormous wasted resources, particularly human resources; to losses running into thousands of millions of pounds; to severe balance of payments problems; and possibly to inadequate fuel resources to supply the British economy".

This statement more than backs up the position which the N. U. M. have taken all along about the need for a good strong coal industry, and I am sure will become the accepted policy of the Labour Party. In fact, the figures contained in the Report are even more optimistic than the figures in the Joint Policy Statement, which the three Unions in the Coal Industry and the N. C. B. have prepared. Here we have a document for discussion in Europe and of course in Britain.

The document deals with all forms of energy and world wide sources of energy. We have estimated that even when we consider the very optimistic figures which are included in the amount of other forms of energy which will be available in 1985, there will still be an energy gap equal to the whole coal production in the European countries at the present time. This energy gap is not the result only of our own predictions, but the result of accepting the predictions of world wide economic experts. The growth in the need for

energy, which we accepted, is forecast by these same economic experts, but even then it does not fully take into account the needs which may develop in the developing countries. There are, as you know, world wide estimates that there will be an energy crisis before the end of this century and it may even be as near as 1980. This statement is borne out by the fact that we already see visible signs of panic in countries like the U.S.A.

In certain parts of America there is already petrol rationing and we know that they are involved at the moment in negotiating with the U.S.S.R. for the purchase of a vast amount of natural gas over the next ten years. This very fact should speak for itself about the view the big industrial countries are taking of the energy problems the world will be talking about. We have been making strenuous efforts as a Union to convince our own Government, first of all and then to convince those who are responsible for making political decisions in Europe, that is the representatives of each of the European Governments, of the urgency of the situation and of the need for the right political decisions to be made.

We have been able, for the first time, to get an agreement with the German Mineworkers' Union and also with other trade unions in Europe on a joint approach on energy. We are constantly battling within the Consultative Committee of the European Coal and Steel Community for the point of view I have already stated. At last we can see some good signs on the horizon. More and more people in important positions are now admitting that there must be a big part for coal to play in any energy plan. We have the Commissioner responsible for energy in Europe propagating the ideas which we have put forward to him as being an integral part of an energy system for Europe, but the main decisions which affect us must be made by our own government and therefore it is imperative now that we press this government to make the decisions which will safeguard the future of the Coal Industry and make provision for its product to be used more and more within the energy scene in Britain.

During this last twelve months we have seen the Tory Government bring forth the Coal Industry Bill; not in our opinion, because they like the N.U.M., or even the Coal Industry, but we believe it is because they realise the facts of life and have been willing to do something to halt the decline in the Coal Industry. They believe that the money which they have made available will enable us within the next three years to put ourselves in order as an Industry and then be in a position to be a viable Coal Industry, able to provide the coal which British Industry will no doubt need at that time. This we believe is why the Coal Industry Bill was put forward, although we as a Union welcome the Coal Industry Bill. We still say that it didn't go far enough to relieve the financial structure or put right the financial structure of the National Coal Board. There should be a halt to pit closures on pure economic grounds and we believe that more strenuous attempts should be made to maximise the amount of coal used in electricity production. We believe that the same applies in the steel industry and other avenues where a national government can use its pressure within the national field and I speak now about the heating of government offices, hospitals, schools and things like these, which are within the control of the national government.

After years of frustration, we have a wonderful opportunity for success now, because I believe the country will be crying out for coal within a very short time and we must be in a position as an industry to fulfill those requirements when the demand for coal increases. I know we can do this. We can ensure jointly, that is the Unions and the N.C.B., that we get the fullest possible production from the very technical machinery which is being installed in our pits and we should seek more and more investment in new and better types of machinery, involving the most up to date techniques.

We must demand, also, fuller participation and more involvement in the running of our own industry. Why, as trade unionists, should we be alarmed at the thought of being involved in management? After all, it is our own industry. It is a nationalised industry, which is as much our industry as the government's and the N.C.B.'s and we should be determined to make it a success story, which I believe we can in these next few years. The success of the Industry means success for the Union members.

It is, however, possible that we may have a difficult period for the next twelve months to eighteen months, but I say here also, that we should have a deep examination of the financial structure of the N.C.B. to find out why it is that although we keep increasing productivity, we still have the position where we have losses being made by the Board year in and year out. We must be determined that this industry is going to be a good and efficient industry, able to provide the coal which Britain and other countries may need and at the quality which the customer is asking for.

The question of the price of the product will always be determined on a market basis, but we must make sure that we get the right price for our product because it is only by doing that that we can ever reach a position where we can get the best benefits for the members whom we represent. Therefore, I say to you that history is turning a complete cycle. I believe that we are getting back to the position which the Coal Industry held in those years immediately after the War when energy was in such short supply and every ounce of coal was needed—and therefore history will repeat itself on that score. But history will not repeat itself in another way.

By that I mean that never again will British Miners be used during a period of energy shortage, never again will we say we shall be more loyal to the rest of the country than to our own members. We shall say to the country and the world that we will provide the coal they need. We will give them the quality and the quantity they need, but they are going to have to pay the right price for it. Never again shall we allow miners' wages to slip down the scale, such as we allowed during those years of 1947—1958 when we really could have got anything we asked for because of the country's need for energy. It was our attitude and natural loyalty during those years which resulted in the slip down the ladder of the wage rates. Miners must be at the head of the wages league because of the nature of the job. After all, that is the job of the Union—a Union I think which has three main objectives:

- (1) To make sure that men who are working to produce the energy which the country needs, must have the highest industrial wages and they must be working in the safest possible conditions.

- (2) When members are genuinely sick or disabled as a result of working in the industry they should be in a position to know that their wages or their incomes are as good as they got when they were able to work.
- (3) In retirement, a miner should know that he is not required to go and shop in some other shop because he should know as of right that his income will be equal to his earnings before retirement.

Around these three objectives I think the whole of Trade Union policy revolves.

In trying to achieve the objectives of the Union which I have just outlined above, we have to realise that certain of these objectives can be achieved industrially and others need political action. We need political action, for example, on the needs for better education, better housing, better retirement pensions, better sickness benefit schemes; all kinds of matters relating to health and welfare mostly need political action. All this as I have said can be dealt with politically. But other issues need industrial action. By these I mean wages and such matters as safety regulations, which have to be thrashed out between ourselves and the employer and then put to government for, if necessary, their legislative action. On the issue of political action, I particularly welcome the Joint Talks which have been taking place between the Trades Union Congress and the Labour Party towards putting forward a joint programme which could be put to the people of Britain as being the manifesto to help us to win the next election. We expect to go forward in the next election as I have said with a joint agreed programme and ensure that when we win the election it will be on a programme fully agreed by all sides of the Movement. It is only by going forward jointly that we can ever hope to change the society with which we are surrounded and which has been uncovered in recent weeks by such issues as the Poulson Case, the Lonhro affair and such matters like that. We still live in a sick and sorry society where not enough of the national income is going to the right people. How is it possible for anyone to expect trade union leaders to be moderate in their claims for wages for the members they represent when they see so much money being available for squandering in the Board Rooms of multitudes of companies with which we are surrounded. After all the money which is being squandered in this way is only being produced from one source and that is from the workers of the country. The people who produce the wealth are not getting their fair share and I am determined that miners are going to get their fair share of the cake which is available to the workpeople of Britain and I am going to fight for a bigger share of that cake to be given and to be made available to the workers of Britain in general. The one way to convince the people of Britain and the workpeople in general that this is a just society is to convince them that the political party which we are affiliated to support, intend when they get to power to change the face of that society, to deal with the financial evils which have prevailed during all of my lifetime and many other people's lifetime too and to ensure that we shall damn well change them whatever the opposition. The Labour Party have got to show to us that they are not content to leave society as it is, because we are telling them that we are no longer content to live in this sick society and have the share of the cake which up to now has been available to us, the crumbs which we have had to accept from year to year. I say quite openly as leader of this Union

that there is no hope for voluntary agreement on wages whether it be Phase III or any other phase. There is no hope of it being successful until we are satisfied that the Government intends to change that sort of society. Therefore I can only say that I wish success to the Joint Talks which are taking place at the moment. The Government have got to know that the ball is at their feet. There is no question of a voluntary agreement on wages whilst we are confronted by a government such as the one we have which has been responsible for the biggest rise in the cost of living in any one single period of government in this last 100 years. It is impossible to get members of the N.U.M. and workers in general, to accept lower wage increases when they can see their cost of living and their standard of living being eroded week in and week out. What with high rises in prices of food, rising rents, rising rates, rising mortgages, rises in the costs of houses which our members are wanting to buy, all of these things which are hitting at the standard of living of our members will make it impossible for a voluntary moderate system to be applied. It's just not possible and therefore no-one should be under any misapprehension about the miners' attitude on these matters. Let nobody misunderstand the vote which took place this year. My own interpretation of the vote was quite simple. I don't think the miners had quite recovered from the wonderful fight they put up nine months previously. People have got to realise that when men have been on strike for seven weeks, they have created debts and those debts have got to be repaid. But let no-one be under any misapprehension as I have just said that when the chips are down the miners will struggle for the right wage for the job, the wage which I have said previously must be the highest industrial wage in Britain because the job warrants that wage. We shall fight for that and fight to keep it there when we get to the top.

Of course, there are many ways in which we can get the wages to the top of the tree. We can follow the time honoured tradition of just putting forward annual applications for wage increases or can seek to increase them in many other ways. I mentioned last year, for example, that we were seeking to involve ourselves in a productivity deal and possibly threshold agreements. Now these have become Union policy, but I am afraid it is not as easy to implement these policies as it is to pass resolutions. We are at the moment involved in an exercise to see if it is possible to get a productivity deal off the ground. I take the view that it would be silly to involve ourselves in a productivity agreement unless that agreement brought forth some really valid results. If you introduced a productivity agreement which did not show anything of a viable character at the end of the exercise, then the whole issue would have been a waste of time and therefore it needs a lot of consideration because at the moment our policy says that we should have a productivity deal which would involve the whole of our membership and of course, these include not only the underground workers, but surface workers, clerical staffs, W.P.I.S., Cokeworkers, etc. How do we get a productivity agreement off the ground to be of equal benefit to all of these members is the big difficulty, which is not helping us to get a productivity agreement started. We are also as I have just said in discussion on the possibility of introducing a threshold agreement which would allow us to have periodic increases as the cost of living rose by a certain figure—and then the gap which would have to

be made up at the end of any particular twelve months, a gap which is created annually by rises in the cost of living, which up to now we have to run after, would not be as great and therefore would perhaps not need as big a battle to be breached.

Another matter which is exercising our attention and which I dealt with in my Presidential Address last year, was our approaches on the issue of members who are involved in shift work. We have had, for many years now, a plus payment for men who we say have to work the unpalatable shifts or unpalatable hours. But nobody has been able to decide what are the unpalatable hours because we have some men who like working those hours between eight o'clock at night and six in the morning for which payment is available at the moment. I have taken the view as I said then that we should be seeking compensation for the fact that a man has to be regarded as a shift worker. His very job necessitates him being either two shifts or three shifts or four shifts or a multiple shift man and we should be seeking compensation because it upsets his whole way of life when he has to change his sleeping hours, his eating hours, even his social hours week in and week out because his job makes it inevitable that he has to change his shift pattern week in and week out and I am pleased to say that the National Executive Committee at its last meeting agreed that we should approach the Board to get payment on this basis rather than on the basis upon which we now get plus payments.

But we must never forget that the wages issue is only the tip of the iceberg in the work of the Trade Union Movement. It is not of much value getting the highest possible industrial wages for our members if the conditions in which they work are not the safest and the best possible that mining knowledge can make available. We have a lot of work to do in this field because we are getting too many disasters. We are getting too many fatalities and although such things as the Lofthouse Disaster in Yorkshire and the Seafield in Scotland bring these matters to the attention of the public, we know that there are too many individual deaths taking place. There are still too many very serious accidents which could also by the thinnest of margins become fatalities. Too often we are finding that widows are being made in the quest for coal and to me the grief of a single widow, a single dependent is just as heartrending as the grief which we find becomes made more aware to the public when we have the death of five or six of our comrades in one particular incident. We find it difficult to talk to the widow of a single man killed when she finds that out of the goodness of the heart the British people have contributed to Appeal Funds to give special benefits to those collective widows, but she as an individual does not receive anything like that same financial help. Therefore we as a Union are seeing if it is possible to set up a National Disaster Fund which we would invite all people to contribute to, not only at the time of a disaster such as the two I have mentioned, but at any time when they feel willing to make contributions to this central fund and then we could make it possible for all widows and dependents to be treated alike. To have these special appeal funds does create difficulties, although it would be stupid for me as President not to say a great "thank you" to those people who have so generously donated into the Appeal Funds both at Lofthouse and at Seafield. I hope, however, that those people who organise these Appeal Funds realise the difficulties which such matters do make for trade unions

like ourselves, who want to do the best for all our members and for our members' widows and dependents.

May I here pay tribute to the work of the Safety Men and the Rescue Brigadesmen and those workers, who have participated in the rescue operations of the two disasters I have mentioned. Their conduct and their fight to try to rescue their colleagues was another terrific example of the spirit of mineworkers in general and I don't think I, as leader of the Union, on behalf of the National Executive Committee and the membership, can give too much praise to their valiant, although unsuccessful rescue attempts.

We shall seek on the international field the extension of research into safety problems of dust and methane, inrushes of water, etc., to see if it is possible by pooling our knowledge to make this industry a lot safer industry than it has been up to now, although it would be wrong to give the indication that the industry is not making strides towards greater safety working. Tremendous strides have been made, but the strides I am afraid have not been made fast enough for my own good and for the good of the members I represent. We must double our efforts here and we must never let ideological boundaries hinder us in seeking this knowledge which we need to make mining the safest possible industry. We intend to organise international conferences and I am pleased to say that we have already been able to organise one later in the year for a group of mineworkers' unions which will perhaps give us the experience necessary to inaugurate a world wide international conference to deal just with the safety aspects of mining without any need to introduce politics of any kind. The miners in Russia, the miners in Britain, the miners in France, Germany, America, even Spain have the same problems and we should be determined as trade unionists to try to solve those problems.

Of course, most of the work we do as a trade union is hidden behind the scenes and no-one knows very much about it. In fact, the public don't think I am aware of this problem at all. The work done by our members and by our members I mean the activists in our Union, who deal with the social security problems which our members are facing week in and week out is something that ought to be highlighted I believe. Instead of the Unions being regarded as a bunch of renegades, people ought to realise that the activists within any Union are those people who are determined to help their fellow members to deal with such problems as special hardships allowances, claims for sickness benefits, claims for redundancy pay and all the rest and a multitude of issues, which take up so much of the time of Branch Officials and I feel I should put on record my appreciation as the National President of the countless hours of a voluntary nature which those local activists of the Union spend to make life better for those of their members, who are not able to help themselves, and by those I mean the sick, the disabled, the retired.

This year, as a Union nationally, we have been able to do one or two things which help in this direction. We have been able, for example, to obtain major improvements in redundancy arrangements. We have been able to procure new redundancy arrangements of an extra lump sum, which is in accordance with the years of service for those of our members who are made redundant between the ages of thirty-five and fifty-five. The full details of this issue (although we know perhaps what the majority of them are) have not been

finalised by the Government and the order has not as yet at the time of writing this Address been put before Parliament. But it will be a far better Redundancy Scheme than applied before and this is on top of the National Government Redundancy Payments Act. For those men over fifty-five we shall see a continuation of the Over Fifty-Fives Agreement, but after their three year payments they will receive a plus payment on top of the unemployment benefit up to the age of sixty five. We hope that this should mean that no longer will redundant miners have to exist on supplementary benefits until they can claim their old age pension.

We have been also able to double the pension without any real increase in contributions from the working members. This is to be raised to £3 and although this is nowhere near the figure which I have mentioned as being our objective in the early part of my speech, should raise some retired miners above the poverty line at which they need to apply for supplementary benefit, although we realise that this created in many cases difficult circumstances because it puts some of our members in an absurd poverty gap position in which they have to choose between supplementary benefit and rent allowance. We are seeking to get the agreement of the people who deal with these allowances to advise the men which of the two benefits they should claim in order that they get the maximum benefit from these matters.

We have also stepped up our campaign to get damages for pneumoconiosis sufferers by appointing a firm of solicitors nationally to get four cases to court next year. We believe that the success or failure of these four cases will help in dealing with the great numbers of cases which are still outstanding and which of course have been delayed because litigation is not only very costly, but it is very slow as well. In fact, it is estimated that although we do not have any cases in court yet, this issue could cost this Union between half and three quarters of a million pounds and it is possible that we may have to come to the members for a levy to cover this purpose.

On improvements in Sick Pay, we were in negotiation with the Board when we were caught up by the Government Freeze and pay norm, because they said that the cost of sick pay would have to be taken into account in dealing with wages. Well, the Board have agreed to increase the maximum period of benefit from twenty to twenty six weeks as soon as the Government allows. This is a small step towards equality of conditions between miners and members of the staff.

But there is one thing troubling us on the question of pneumoconiosis benefits. There have been disturbing rumours that the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council which is reviewing the medical legal definition of pneumoconiosis might recommend tougher conditions for getting compensation in future. Let me warn the Government now that if this is so they ought not even to consider accepting any such recommendation. The N.U.M. will be utterly opposed to any moves not to compensate future cases of simple pneumoconiosis, especially at a time when the Government itself is considering banning such men from dusty face work. We, in fact, are seeking to extend for compensation purposes such things as bronchitis and emphysema. We believe that miners who contract these diseases only do that as a result of having to work in dusty conditions which mining abounds with. We believe that instead of making it harder, it ought to be easier to claim compensation

for miners who as I have just said, contract these dust diseases. We will not tolerate at all any taking away from miners the right to benefits which they have enjoyed for many years now.

So, as I said in the beginning of my Address, many of our desires can be achieved industrially, but many others can only be achieved politically. That is why I think politics are important to trade Unionists. I think any trade union leader who believes that politics don't matter in the way he can achieve benefits for his members is being very, very naive, because we keep quoting that we need better conditions, living and working conditions, for members, not only of the N.U.M., but of all sections of the trade union movement. We have stated, along with a lot of other unions, that we want to see the repeal of the Industrial Relations Bill, that very famous non Bill, which has never yet been used by many employers of any sense and in fact, is now lying moribund except when cranky individual members of unions seek to take it upon themselves to be regarded as martyrs.

I make one thing quite clear. The N.U.M. will never allow non-unionism to creep into our industry because of this Act, whatever the consequences. So we as a Union, along with all the other Unions need the Act to be fully repealed; we want the Housing Finance Bill likewise to be repealed. We also want control of the prices of basic and necessary foods. We want to be able to negotiate with our employer freely.

We welcome therefore the programme put forward by the Labour Party, which promises to do all these things, along with many other necessary social changes when they get returned to power. This programme will be the subject for discussion at the Labour Party Conference in October and as I have said is the result in many hours of joint discussions with the T.U.C. Therefore, if after discussion, we reach agreement in the democratic way which prevails at the Conference this programme must form the basis of the next election manifesto. We can then go forward to that election confident that the two wings of the movement are together as never before. I state quite categorically that if we approach the election united we will sweep the deck and provide a basis for a continuation of Labour Governments, which will be dedicated to change this society. This is what the Trade Union and Labour Movements need, and we shall never forgive any part of the Movement who by their actions, create internal bickering and disunity. We have no time for this in the ranks of the Union and we have less time for it in the political field. It is not very important for us to say how many firms we would nationalise when we come to power. I think it is sufficient to say we intend to extend nationalisation in accordance with Clause IV, Section (4) of the Labour Party Constitution. Let there be no bickering on this issue, because by arguing amongst ourselves we waste energy which we need to attack the common political enemy, that is the Tory Party. As a Trade Union Leader, I never cease to wonder how a Tory Government ever gets elected. It can only be because a split exists between the political and industrial wings of our movement. We must be determined that such a thing never happens again. We must be fully united in ensuring that a Labour Government is elected next time, a Labour Government which will have learned the lessons of the last time they were in power. Never again will we tolerate introduction of policies which split the movement. Working together we can win election success, not only next

time, but for evermore. Then we can look forward to the introduction of Socialist policies in line with all the ideals which we in the Miners' Union and all the other Trade Unions keep expressing in resolution form year after year. Together we can create a more just society, a society of which our children and our children's children will be proud. We must continue as Trade Unionists to shout to the world that we are completely united in our determination to create that sort of society that we still have belief in and that we still believe in that old adage, which many times gets forgotten—Unity is Strength and Unity will bring us Success.