

## PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

MR. M. McGAHEY (Vice-President): Fellow Delegates, visitors, it is now my great pleasure and pride to call upon our President, Mr. Joe Gormley, to present his Presidential Address to Conference. Mr. Gormley.

CHAIRMAN (J. GORMLEY, ESQ., O.B.E.): Once again, it's my responsibility for giving this Annual Conference of the N.U.M. this Presidential Address.

I don't like having to write a Presidential Address, because normally before you have time to give the Address, it is many times out of date, and this is inevitable with the speed at which things are happening at the present time, but it is important that there should be some record made of the thoughts of the President when he is dealing with the problems of the Union.

My first thought this morning is that I am proud and honoured to be representing this great Union, to be leading such a unified body of dignified workers, who have shown their determination to get the best possible standard of living for the members of the Union, because after all, the Union is not some structure, some creature. It is, in fact, every one of the members of the Union, who pay their contributions and have a right to express their opinions as to how the Union should approach the issues involved. That is why it gives me the greatest of pleasure this morning, once again for the second time in the last three years to say a great big thank you to the members for their complete solidarity during the recent dispute we had with the Government. This dispute was not of our making, but a dispute which arose because we were not being allowed to negotiate what we believed were the necessary wages to meet the situation which faced this country. The wages, which we knew were necessary to stop the drift of manpower away from the pits and, in fact, to help recruitment at a time when the Coal Industry would have to play a bigger and more important role in the energy requirements of this country of ours. That was why the dispute started and not because of any fancy ideas which the politicians stated later on, for example, that we had set out deliberately to wreck the economy and to force an election. That was a completely false image, which was created by the Tory Party, and Ted Heath in particular, with his arguments about Reds under the beds and what have you, trying to create an impression that the miners were deliberately using this as a political ploy to change the Government. There was never any necessity for an election because Ted Heath had a sufficient majority to rule the country, a majority he would have been glad of and would have thought sufficient after the election, that is a majority of 15 overall. We are, of course, not grumbling about the decision to hold an election, but trying to show how false the arguments were, because any Government with that majority after this election would have thought themselves well endowed and strong enough to run the country. So why was it that Ted Heath deliberately set his stall against allowing a settlement to take place in our dispute? It can only be, in my opinion, because he hoped to get a further five years' term of office trying to ride in on the backs of the miners in this dispute and hoping to use the picketing lines as an example of how Britain was in danger of anarchy and therefore the electorate should return a Tory Government.

I am pleased to say that the members of this Union did not contribute in any way to any success of the Tory Party, and I believe, in fact, if all Unions had followed the example of the Miners' Union we would have had an overall Labour majority. But, be that as it may, Ted called the election and he can blame no-one else for having lost the election. We did not want this battle. We wanted a settlement. Eventually, after the election, we got what we thought was an honourable settlement, a settlement which could have been made much earlier and without as much

heartache for many people, because here we had a government which deliberately used every political ploy for example, putting the rest of British Industry on a three-day week, complaining about supplies of energy, when in fact, there were still millions of tons of coal on the ground at the end of the dispute.

At the end of our exercise, when we had reached a settlement, it was shown that there was never any necessity for a three-day working week. It was ludicrous for a government to say that, because the miners would not work six or seven days a week, the rest of British Industry would have to work on a three-day week. It was one of the biggest crimes ever perpetrated against the British economy, and I hope it is something the people of Britain will never forgive the Tory Party for. So, therefore, as I have said before, I am proud and honoured to be able to say to the members a great thank you for your solidarity.

That solidarity is something I have worked hard to achieve in my three years as President. I have tried my best in the National Executive Committee to not allow divisions on issues where there ought never to be divisions, and I do not thank any member or official who tries to create the feeling that disunity is with us. Let me put the record straight here. Never at any time, during the whole of the recent dispute, was there any move to accept the offer of the Coal Board which was aligned with Government policy, except until the last meeting we had after the election, when we were allowed to negotiate. The only differences of opinion there were during that time was whether it was right to go to the members for their backing for the National Executive Committee, at any one particular time or another. That was the only issue involved. Of course, and it has been made public, you all know my own feelings which were that once the election was called, I did not see any necessity for a strike, because I knew the battle was won. I knew that whichever government was elected they would inevitably have to settle in a way which the members of the N.U.M. would be willing to accept.

So, therefore, in thanking the members, I want to say to them now, let us be united in looking forward to the future. We have, at the moment, a wonderful opportunity. We have the position where coal is now an accepted part of the energy scene and will remain so for many, many years ahead. This is quite a different situation from the 1960's which Josh has talked about, when everyone was writing us off. Even before the incidence of the increase in the oil prices by the Arab countries (which we had forecast would happen) even before that, the place of coal was becoming more and more assured as those other sources of energy were becoming, not more plentiful, but in fact, more scarce.

Now, we welcomed in those days, the finding of North Sea Oil, and we welcome still, the new findings of North Sea Oil, because we see this as another instrument for making Britain independent in the very short term for all supplies of energy. This small industrial nation of ours cannot afford to have to depend on outside sources for energy for our industries, upon which we so heavily rely. Therefore, we welcome the North Sea Oil and all the benefits it will bring to us. Let us insist that the benefits from the North Sea Oil are returned to the country, which after all owns the oil. We know there may be differences of opinion between us as to whether this is Scottish oil or British oil or anybody else's oil. This oil belongs, in my opinion, to Britain, and must be used for the benefit of the British people, because we believe that this, together with nuclear and natural gas, being the part of the energy scene which cannot be filled by

coal in the future, can be seen to be a real windfall for Britain, because it would seem that in five or six years' time we can be in a position to be able to export some of that oil. However, that can only happen if we as a Coal Industry are able to fulfil the requirements thrust upon us.

As you know, your Union has — or your Union leaders have — for many years been arguing that the role of Coal in the economy, having regard to the energy needs of the economy, should be growing rather than decreasing, and I think we have won that battle, because more and more people are now saying that it is foolish to ignore this source of wealth under our feet, the source of wealth which is known and we are not alone in these thoughts, that coal should be the base-load of any energy plans for Britain, and I am very glad to say that in the review of the Industry, which we have been having, the Government and in particular, the Civil Servants, behind the Government, are now being convinced that our arguments have been right all along and that therefore we should be taken more notice of.

The Interim Report of the Joint Review has just been published, and in fact on Friday last week was accepted by the National Executive Committee, and although I don't have time to elaborate too much it is sufficient for me to say that this minority Labour Government has accepted the plans of the Coal Board for an expansion of the Coal Industry. They plan to increase deep-mined production in ten years from 120 million tons this year to 135 million tons by 1985, and Opencast from 10 million tons to 15 million tons in the same period, and these are minimum figures which we believe will be the necessity of that time. This means a massive investment of many hundreds of millions of pounds has to be made. The Government have also accepted that they must provide a great deal of the finance necessary to deal with the possible settlement — I say "possible settlement", because it is a settlement now — of the pneumoconiosis position caused by the famous Pickles case, and the need to introduce a real Pension or Superannuation Scheme for Miners and their dependants. These are things which have been accepted by this minority Government, and will mean commitments of this kind the Government will have to find hundreds of millions of pounds, and it proves that we need a Government sympathetic to our Industry and the people who work in it.

So we have a job to do. We have to win public and Parliamentary support for these schemes, and to do this we need this year to produce at least 120 million tons of coal. That must be the minimum we produce this year, but I am afraid we are falling behind that target quite a lot. We need to increase our production in order to meet the target this year, so that the critics who are saying still that the Coal Industry cannot produce the goods may be completely silenced. The intention is, as I have already said, in the next few years, to build up a big mine production, not only to the 120 million tons mark this year or as high as 135 million tons, but even more than that. We need to assure the people of this country that the plans and the money which is needed to be invested to create that tonnage figure is going to be money which will be well invested. We have got to show the country this year that coal production is possible to be achieved, because we have many critics, particularly in the light of recent events, but it is for us to dumbfound our critics and prove to them that the Miner's Union and the members of the Union themselves, concerned with coal production, are intent upon making this the good, strong, viable Coal Industry which we have always claimed it should be in order that the

benefits can accrue, not only to the members of the N.U.M., but also to the rest of society. After all we fought for nationalisation. It is for us to make sure now that it works and works successfully and creates the atmosphere which will destroy these other people who argue that nationalisation is a dirty word. It is not a dirty word and it is for us to prove to the people of this country that it is not. We intend to do that, and we hope that the whole of the membership is intending to do that, too.

Now, in order to achieve those output figures, it means that we have all got to be involved. Every man at the pit must feel important. He must feel himself part of the whole establishment. He must feel part of the Industry and an important part of the Industry, because each one of us depends on the other. No one man is self-sufficient. It means that we have all got to be involved in the running of this Industry. We, as yet, have not accepted or even discussed this question of workers' participation in management or even workers' control, any of these cliches, we have not yet discussed. But the T.U.C. have recently issued a Policy Document saying that Industry should be so remodelled as to provide 50 per cent worker representation on Board or Management Bodies, these to be elected by the Trade Unions. There are many points of view on this issue, and I personally feel that we in the Mining Industry have nothing to fear. But as I have already said, we have not as yet decided our policy, so let us see if we can use what we already have.

We have sufficient machinery available even now to ensure that we get the maximum production from the machines which we already have in the pits, that we make the best possible use of all the new techniques that have been introduced and that we seek further and better techniques to increase that position. It is through the Consultative Committees, which we should seek to strengthen, that we would ask you all to play your full part in every pit, so that at the end of the year we can be shown as an example as to what workers are willing to do to make a success of their nationalised industries. Together we can make it work and together we will make it work.

One of the points which goes along with the ability to create this production is what we have been saying all along, the need to make the job attractive. For too long the Mining Industry was looked upon as a cinderella, an Industry which could only attract the right type of manpower or the right numbers of manpower when there was either high unemployment outside or when men were being directed to the pits because there was a war on. We have got to make sure this is an Industry which will attract manpower in its own right, that it is an Industry in which men will want to come and work rather than because they are forced to work in it because of outside circumstances. That we can do by ensuring that men get the right wages for the job, that they work in the best possible safety conditions and that their home lives are happy and they are living in good housing accommodation and they have good recreational facilities. That should be the objective for the miners' union. Therefore, we should never flinch when we claim that we need the right wages for the job and there are many ways in which we can get the right wages for the job.

One of the parts of the last Agreement which has shown itself so valuable has been the Threshold Agreement, and irrespective of some of the comments which have been made these last few days by prominent politicians who were suggesting these approaches, and they cannot recriminate anybody else if they are now finding out these are good

agreements for the workers who, I think, were wise enough to sign such types of agreement. I know there are some Trade Union Leaders that are not quite happy with Threshold Agreements, because they say it takes away the credit given to the Trade Union Leaders when rises are given. I don't give a damn about credit as long as it puts money into my members' wages packet at a time when their standard of living is being decreased as a result of the increase in the cost of living.

For too long we have lived in the climate where we have had to be running like hell to stand still, and I think it is appropriate that we should have a Threshold Agreement which periodically, during every year, gives increases in wages automatically because people in government have not been able to hold back the cost of living. We have never yet held back the cost of living increase in my life, for very long, and every twelve months one of the big arguments we have always had has been that we need this amount of increase in order to make up for the increased cost of living during the preceeding twelve months, but that was only to attain the position we should have been in automatically. Therefore, that part of the Agreement has shown its value already; also there is no reason that whilst we are negotiating increases in real wages, we should not also be getting the value of the increased productivity which I have already indicated is necessary, if we are going to create for this Industry that feeling of security not only for the workers, who work in the Industry, but to those people who are relying on coal for their energy requirements. We have to satisfy the customers as well as satisfying the workers within the Industry, because unless we satisfy the customers, there is not going to be very much for the workers involved in the Industry. Therefore, there is no reason at all why we shouldn't have a Productivity Scheme. I know this is old hat; we have been talking about it for a long while, but there is no reason why we should not have a Productivity Scheme, which gives periodic rises automatically as a result of increases in productivity. We have had difficulty in trying to get the Scheme off the ground because of Union policy in itself. The policy at the moment is that we should try to get a national scheme, as a national umbrella involving every member of the Union, and this you can take it from me is damn difficult, because unless we can introduce a scheme which is really beneficial immediately, and which shows valid returns immediately, the whole idea could fall flat, and I think that we have got to have a look at our own policy. What have we to fear when we get down to areas or even to pit level, on the full understanding that we never get back again to that jungle that we escaped from a few years ago, the jungle of piece-work, incidentally, upon which I was bred and with which I lived most of my working life. Nobody wants to get back to that jungle, but there is no reason why we can't marry a National Scheme to a Pit Scheme. I know this may sound sacrilegious to some of the people listening, but I have to reiterate what I said at the beginning. These are my thoughts as yet and may or may not become Union policy. My sole desire is to keep ensuring a better and better standard of living for the members, with the least possible hurt to them and their families. Let me explain to you my ideas. We could set up at each pit, because after all that's where production starts — it does not start in London or anywhere else; it starts at the pit — and we would set up joint committees to decide what is the production norm at that pit, taking into account the conditions which exist at the Colliery and which will change from time to time. Up to the norm would attract the normal

wage rates negotiated nationally. Production over the norm would attract bonus payments for everybody working at that colliery in accord with a scale laid down nationally. We could then get the average bonus earned in each Area and apply that in Central Workshops Stores, Area Offices, etc. Then finally, every six, nine or twelve months the National Average Bonus be added automatically to the basic wage and everything start from that new plateau. That is marrying the national scheme with the local involvement which I feel is necessary to get the local lads at the branches to feel that they are in fact an important part of this Union, to get them back again to thinking the job is worthwhile rather than as has been over the last few years just become a letterbox for national policy. I believe we can do this if we want to do it.

So let us have a look at these ideas. Why are we afraid of looking at these sort of ideas? Because, believe me, I see money running away from us because we have not the willingness to grasp the nettle. We ought to have an automatic position, as I have just said of threshold agreements for cost of living increases, automatic increases in wages as a result of increase in productivity and all that we would need would be topping up processes every so often to make sure that the earnings were constituting a real increase, rather than just keeping up to a fixed set pattern. However, that is for the Union to discuss. It is only as yet for me to put ideas forward and see whether they land on any germane soil.

Of course, when we talk about wages for miners we should never forget that miners cannot live in isolation. There are other groups of workers who also need wages, and I refer particularly to those who are not in a position to negotiate from the same strength that perhaps we were able to negotiate from. I refer to those in the Public Services, who have to rely on the income from taxes, etc., for their money, which will be allocated not only for the running of the hospitals, schools and the building of roads, houses, etc., but also to pay the wages of those employed in those Industries. We as a Miners' Union should never be seen to be thinking just purely of ourselves. We have got to make sure that the wages paid to these people is commensurate with their job and their responsibility, too. We have seen examples, over the recent weeks of the plight of nurses and how they are more determined now to fight for what they think is right. But they can only get what is right for themselves if money is available for them, and even if it means more personal taxes and higher taxes on some of the fantastic profits still being made, in order to make that money available to these other industries then the Miners' Union must not jib at fighting for these objectives. We must not keep saying that we are the only ones who matter. We are part of society and we have to live in that society and to be seen as a responsible part of that society. That's why it is important that we do think that politics matter.

As I have said earlier on in my Address, we had this difficulty with the Government at that time because we could not convince them that what we were talking about was just. It has been proved since that it was just and it has been proved since the Election that the Labour Party for which we fought, is the only Party which can give us the social justice upon which the whole Labour Movement was founded. It is my contention, therefore, that whatever we do we must ensure a succession of Labour Governments always dedicated to the decisions of the Labour Party Conference, but who are determined to put the social injustices right and the record of this minority government since they took office is

unique. They increased the pensions immediately, as one of their first priorities. They froze rents, and although there is a difficulty administratively about these pensions being paid these together with food subsidies, will be seen as social steps forward, which we have advocated for so many years, but these can only be looked upon as interim steps in the different frameworks of society, which we as members of the Labour Movement are determined should be introduced.

We hope to have before the end of this month, the erasure from the Statute Book of that well-known Act, the Industrial Relations Act, which we argued for so many years, was unnecessary and was completely unworkable and which on two occasions we have proved was completely unworkable, because the Government never tried to apply it to us. Therefore, we should welcome the fact that this will soon become a part of history. But that does not mean to say that there is an open sesame available to everybody. I am willing to say to the N. U. M. that we, for our part, can examine the theory of a voluntary wages policy, but it is only within the context of Government policy that there is social justice for everybody being applied and applied in the way which the Labour Party resolutions outlined from year to year say they should be.

Let us say, as a Trade Union, and let us say from this Conference, that if the going gets too tough for this minority Labour Government, if the progress towards this social justice which I have mentioned gets continually frustrated by the actions of the opposition, do not hesitate to go to the country for a mandate. We should pledge that the whole Trade Union Movement would be mobilised to ensure the Labour Government would be returned with the necessary majority to implement the ideals contained in the various conference resolutions.

Therefore, never let us forget in our deliberations on wages and conditions, etc., that other people are important as well as us, that we have a part to play as I have already said, and that part, of course, includes the need for ensuring that the miners' conditions are the best possible that the world can provide.

We must never forget in our talks on increasing productivity that nothing will be allowed to weaken the standards of safety which apply now and which will no doubt be strengthened by future legislation.

Our accident rate, measured on a basis of 100,000 manshifts worked, trend in a favourable direction, but the rate of improvement cannot and must not be considered satisfactory.

We must always be acutely aware of the traps and snares set in the path of progress — the relative ease in coalmining with which adverse circumstances, by coinciding both in time and place, can culminate in a major disaster resulting in large losses of life and limb, and we have to be reminded of these recent activities in this field where we have had Lofthouse, Seafield and Markham disasters with us only recently, and as recently as last Friday we were informed that in two other countries mining disasters have taken place, one in Poland and one in West Germany. I use the term "major disaster" here in a numerical context; we all know that any accident causing a single death or serious injury is a major disaster for some family. This means we have to ensure higher standards of management and supervision, and workmanship must not be impaired. Greater care, diligence and discipline must be exercised.

Furthermore, we should in my opinion, hasten the establishment of a National Safety Organisation for the Union; (2) We should ensure that Section 123 Inspections are regularly carried out at all collieries, and (3)

to provide efficient training schemes for Section 123 Inspectors, who we all know are termed Workmen's Inspectors. We should meet the Board and other Unions to discuss ways and means by which they can mount greater opposition to danger.

I want to make a few points here with regard to the new Health and Safety at Work legislation. I am saying on behalf of the N.U.M. and the full N.E.C. that we will not tolerate any deterioration of standards, nor will we suffer a decrease in efficiency or effectiveness in mine safety inspections. On safety and health research, we will not approve a diminution of effort and we will not allow any erosion of the protection afforded our members. Assurances have been given to us on these points by the present Minister and they must hold good irrespective of any change of Minister or Government.

I have to report we are now at the present time actively participating in the various Safety and Health Committees of the European Community. Our industry and our members will benefit considerably in time from this contact. Nothing but good can derive from playing an active part in combined programmes of research and investigation, and by the free exchange of experiences and of knowledge across the whole broad spectrum of mine safety and health. That is why we are proud to be associated with all the Miners' Unions in the world in trying to seek out ways and means of helping one another to find out how we are each approaching the safety factors, to try to see whether we have any lessons to learn from one another, to try to ensure that the lessons we learn are applied. We, at the moment, are involved in discussions with, not only the Miners' Unions of the Western World, but the Miners' Unions throughout the world on the safety issue. We should continue these Conferences and these probes in order that we reach the point where mining is no longer looked upon as an industry, where accidents and disease are an inevitable part of our life.

So we have many things yet to tackle. We need a strong Labour Government, as I have said, to create the type of society, which we as a Trade Union Movement have fought for since our formation, a society based on social justice for everyone and not a select few. We need a government determined to ensure that the wealth of the country, not only the manufactured wealth, but the natural wealth contained in the minerals and the land are used for the creation of a better life for all, a free and happier Society.

To play our full part as the N.U.M. in creating this position, we need also to have a completely united Union, a Union not beset by personality problems, a Union where differences of opinion will be respected, but where there is determination to be together in ensuring the greatest possible success in achieving not only our objectives, but those of the whole Labour and Trade Union Movement of Britain.

This way Britain can once again have a great voice in the struggle for world peace and the creation of a world fit for our children and our children's children to live in. These should be the ideals we pledge ourselves to.