

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

MR. M. McGAHEY (Vice-President, National Union of Mineworkers): Fellow Delegates, it is my pleasure and duty to call upon the President, Mr. Joe Gormley, to deliver his Presidential Address. Mr. Gormley.

CHAIRMAN (J. Gormley, Esq., O.B.E., President): The difficulty of making a Presidential Address as I have explained before, you write an address, you have to get it printed, the day before it is printed you throw it away and you write another and that is out of date. I was only writing this at the beginning of this week and it is already out of date. I will do my best. I will see what happens. At this Conference we can look forward with a new heart to the success of this Coal Industry, because since last Conference, we have had published and accepted by the Government, the Coal Industry Final Examination Report. The Tripartite Committee, which was set up by the minority Labour Government in 1974 was fully backed by the new Government of October 1974 and, in fact, the Report has been accepted by the whole of the House of Commons, all sides contributing to the need to make a success of this Coal Industry of ours.

It is fascinating, having been involved in arguments for years and years about the need to have a strong Coal Industry in Britain as part of an overall energy plan, based on residual fuels available to Britain, that we should now find ourselves in this position where the Government have accepted the feelings which we have been expressing over those many, many years. The plan follows, very nearly identically, the plans which we in the N.U.M. had said should be made for the Industry. It follows also the 'Plan for Coal', which was published by the National Coal Board and the plan which was eventually accepted by the T.U.C. and the Labour Party. It is this identity of purpose between everybody involved in the Industry, which should guarantee the success of the plan. That plan, which I am talking about envisages a bigger and stronger Coal Industry, making a valuable contribution to the economy of this country of ours, and it has as its objective on production, that we should seek to reach the target of 150 million tons per annum by the year 1985. But, of course, this is not the ultimate target. Now this target must be related to a production in the year 1974 of approximately 115 million tons, so you can see that there is a big gap to be filled and a new emphasis has got to be placed on the need to create more and more production, year in and year out. The present target figure, which we are talking about is approximately 5 per cent per year.

Now, there are many sceptics even amongst our own members as to whether this is possible or not. But, after years and years of arguing about the need for a bigger reliance on the Coal Industry, it must not be seen to be, because of the inactivity of the members of the Union, that we are not able to reach these targets. The target this year we are hoping will be in the region of between 122 and 123 million tons and we were heading for that figure in the first weeks of this present quarter, but I am afraid that in the last few weeks, or the last five or six weeks to be correct, the trend has been dropping rather than rising and so we are in danger of not living up to what we as a Union were saying on behalf of our members about the production possibilities of the Industry. We have, therefore, got to ensure to our members that it is in their interest and in the interests of the

economy in general and the interests of this Industry, which we fought so hard to retain, that we should pull out all the stops, that we should remove every obstacle which stands in the way of this continuation in the increase of production, which is so necessary if we want to achieve all those desires which we say should be the right of the members of our Union, who after all produce coal for Britain.

We must impress upon everyone that the present stocking of coal is no threat to future security. Every ounce will be needed as the economy picks up as it inevitably will. Without that coal production and without the achievement of those objectives, I am afraid the rest of the plan may be scuppered too, because within the plan is envisaged that the Government, plus what the Coal Board were going to find from their own resources, would be ploughing money into this Industry to the tune of 140 million pounds per year on new developments, new machinery, new techniques, etc., and we were hoping that this new transformation of the Industry would be welcomed by our members and seen as not another of the stop/go pictures, which we have been facing over the years.

I can't do too much and I hope you and your colleagues, who are Union Officials cannot do too much in ensuring to the membership that it is in their interests and in the interests of everybody in the country that this great industry of ours meets the targets which we as a Union, on your behalf, said were possible of achievement. We know it can be done and I am damn sure you know it can be done. Therefore, we must do it, because when all is said and done the success or failure of this Industry will not rely on documents or plans, but will be determined by the efforts of those, who have to produce the coal of Britain. It means a lot of money being ploughed in by the Government and therefore on our side we have got to meet our responsibilities and make sure that the plan does not fall into default because of our own inability to get the Industry cracking.

Now, I look at this report as more or less a bible for the future of the Coal Industry. It needs as I have indicated from many platforms, two main essentials. It needs a happy workforce, determined to make the best of the plan, to make the best use of the machinery that is available and to insist on getting better and better machinery, the introduction of new techniques and it also needs a good, strong Government and a good strong Labour Government, such as the one which we have today, which has already demonstrated its faith in the men in the Industry.

I am sure that for our part we as a Union had tried in the last four years to create conditions which would lead to a far happier workforce that was the position a few short years ago. We have not reached the ultimate. I don't believe we ever will reach the ultimate, because as fast as we deal with one Miners' Charter, we receive another set of marching orders the following year. But I don't mind that. I don't mind pressure groups. I don't mind putting pressures to work to ensure that we fight for the right things, but we on our part have to put pressure on ourselves to make sure that we are playing our part, too. I appeal to the members to play their full part in ensuring that nobody can fault us in saying or being able to say that the N.U.M. failed to provide the share of the plan which was their responsibility.

Now, as I have said just previously it also needs a good strong Labour Government because if we had an Election which resulted in a change of Government, there might, I say, only might, be a change in attitude towards providing the cash, which would be needed to make the plan successful, the cash which is necessary from National resources, because we believe that it is only from this source that we shall get this money which will modernise this Industry, but only because it is in the interests of the country that we have this good,

strong, modern Coal Industry, playing a useful part in providing a lot of the energy which Britain's industry relies upon.

Therefore, I hope that nothing we do is going to be seen by the Labour Movement as a step towards stopping or changing the direction of the politics of the country at the moment.

Few of us can deny that since this Government was elected in 1974, first as a minority, and later on by a small majority, the programme of legislation has been pressed forward with great vigour, despite the continuing external economic environment and the deepest recession in the Western World since the Second World War. I know that with our continued support, they will carry on attempting to fulfil the mandate upon which they were elected. Therefore, I hope we can do our business in such a way that we are not seen to be threatening the very livelihood of this Government upon which we so much rely — as much as they rely on us.

That means that we have to have unity of purpose. Just as the Miners were successful in their arguments for wages because there was a complete unity of purpose, there must be complete unity of purpose in the Labour and Trade Union movement. There can be no false divisions; there can be no false attitudes if we are hoping to achieve the sort of society which is contained within the Manifesto plans, upon which the Government was elected.

There can be no weakening of these attitudes because I believe as I have said, that the Labour Government and the Labour Party itself can learn a lesson from the N.U.M. by having the unity to deal with the economic problems which no doubt face us. There is a need to tackle and arrest and solve the economic problems and the inflation, which surrounds us all because inflation affects Miners as much as it affects anybody else. Whilst I have said that we will do what we have to do to get the right wages for the job let us never think that we can be an oasis in the middle of a desert, that the Miners can exist and have a good standard of living, while everyone around just has to be content with the crumbs, that is not the way to keep a united Trade Union movement, or a united Labour Movement.

We must discuss our attitude to wages and related benefits, at this Conference, in such a way as not to give ammunition to the Press and the Opposition, who are hoping to get from these sort of Conferences, signs that there is no unity within the Trade Union and Labour Movements. They will grab at every word which is said, which can be turned into an expression, illustrating that the Miners of Britain could not care less about other people around us. We do care and because we care, we have got to realise that the wherewithal from Industries like ours and other production Industries must be sold and produce enough to create the wealth which is sufficient to finance the great Socialist Society, which will make it possible for us all, to have the things which Trade Unionists have set out to achieve. By that, I mean good Social Security systems, good Hospitals, good Schools, so that the sick and the injured can receive adequate payments, so that men and women, when they retire, have not got to shop in a lower priced shop just because they are retired. We have got to get people to be glad to retire, to want to reach retirement age, knowing that they will not have to suffer in a pecuniary way.

We see the sort of society which we were set up to establish, which we were set up to fight for and it is a society, which can only be achieved by the unified efforts of the Labour and Trade Union Movement upon which this country will have to rely so heavily in the future.

I don't believe as a Trade Union Movement and particularly as a Miner's Union, that we should be setting out deliberately year after year in seeking to challenge the authority of the elected Governments such as many people in the

country believe we do. We set out to achieve a standard of living for Miners, a standard of living to which we think they are entitled, but in doing that we must not be seen to be at all times wanting to just throw down the gauntlet and invite the Government to pick it up. That is why we as a Union should join with all the affiliated Unions to the T.U.C., to try to work hand in hand with the present Government to solve these economic problems which surround us.

With some of the ideas which are floating around that the sole cause of inflation are high wage agreements, I must say I disagree, but nevertheless, I have got to admit that they must play some part in the inflationary situation we find ourselves in. But for me, having been able to travel in many countries, I have studied their wage patterns and find that in many countries, in Europe, America and elsewhere, wages for similar jobs are far higher than they are in the United Kingdom. Therefore, I ask myself this question. Is it truly high wages which cause inflation? Or is it because we are not getting from the machines in Britain both in Coal Mining and in all the other productive Industries, the return on the capital, which has been invested in this machinery? Why is it that we don't pay enough attention to unit costs? Why is it that we carry on with this idea that nothing is wrong with British Industry and we go along in this Laissez-Faire attitude, which has been with us for so many years, that it does not matter about production or unit costs? This is the only thing separating us from those other countries, which are able to pay high wages, and they are able to pay high wages and not have the same rate of inflation, because their unit costs and their production per man shift must be far higher than it is in Britain.

There is some reason for this and the reason in my opinion needs to be found out and it would be far better if there was a lead given by the Government to have a deep examination into every one of these Industries to find out what is wrong. My belief is that British Industry for too long, has relied on too much overtime. Overtime, for me has always been a wonderful excuse to hide management deficiencies and an ability to manage their Industries, an inability to find out why the things they are producing are not able to be sold in the markets of the World.

There is a need for us to make a determined attempt in Britain to put ourselves on a par with these other countries because unless we do this, people will just not buy British goods because they are British. They will buy the goods in the markets of the World which they can afford if they are of the same quality and they can get them in the right quantity and they can get them at the right time. This is where I think the emphasis has got to be in Britain. Not in this hysterical outcry, which many people are trying to make out is the entire cause of our inflation and that is high wage claims. Holding wages back in one period only results in added pressures in the next period, but if high wage claims are related to the production and increased production, then I feel sure there is nothing wrong with high wages. They can only be good as an incentive to produce the goods which we need to sell in the markets of the World.

Here may I refer to our present position. In spite of a National productivity bonus scheme, the output trends, as I have already mentioned, are downwards instead of in the other direction. This is conclusive proof to me that a National bonus scheme is no answer and will prove to be a dead loss. Therefore, we have to have another look at this issue. The policy of the Union is to introduce a productivity bonus scheme and in doing this, it must have two criteria. (1) It must encourage production, and (2) it must prove to be of real financial benefit to the members of the Union. The present scheme seems to be doing neither. Now I want to appeal to my colleagues, particularly those whose political beliefs support the philosophy of the Governments of most Eastern European countries. Why don't we follow the examples shown by the Miners' Unions in those countries. Every one of them has found out that flat rate wages do not provide

the necessary incentive for maximum output, so they have established pit and workshops incentive schemes, based on production targets arranged at that level, because they, like myself, believe that it is only the local people who know the conditions and therefore are in a position to establish a target of production, which all the workers at that Colliery or Workshop, etc., can be closely identified and involved with. A National scheme is too remote from the point of production.

I would like to see established as I have said many times, an automatic approach to better and better wages, i.e.,

- (a) Increases in basic rates, periodically as a result of cost of living increases, perhaps every six, nine or twelve months.
- (b) Increase at the same time by the inclusion of the average production bonus earned, and a review of the targets at each unit automatically.

This would mean that we would not have to keep running fast to stand still on wages and we would then only have the task of topping up to get a real increase in living standards.

Surely this approach is better than some of the ideas which are contained in some of the resolutions we keep getting put on the different agendas and even the National agenda. There is not a great negotiating merit in picking figures out of the air, and after repeating them a few times try to make out that they are sacred. At the risk of being pulled to pieces later on in this Conference I must make some comment on these issues. We keep constantly hearing resolutions being carried in Areas of the Union demanding free collective bargaining, and at the same time supporting a resolution which lays down certain wage levels, not as a target, not as something to be achieved eventually by negotiations but as specific demands, failing which we start talking about strike action.

The two things do not go together because free bargaining is not possible where either side ties the hands of the negotiators. I appeal to Conference not to tie the hands and feet of your N.E.C.

But the Resolution itself, speaking as it does of 80 to 85 pounds and 100 pounds, is asking this Union to pledge itself to insist on an increase in wages for all its members (and I stress the word "all") which is higher than the amount of the National minimum wage being demanded at the moment by the T.U.C. This, in the economic position facing us is neither logical or even militant, it is madness. If the resolution is carried and our claim is not accepted, do we believe we would get much support from the rest of the movement, when we are asking for all our members an increase in wages higher than the wage being earned by the big majority of workers in many other fields.

We have proved in the last three to four years that this Union has great industrial power and maybe some of us have become a little drunk with this power and are constantly wanting to be flexing our muscles. I believe that when you get that way, it is necessary to stop and reflect as to whether we should use that strength to further our own ends or whether we should use it wisely to create a better position for all workers. It is my candid opinion that it would help to destroy us if we were seen to be driving a big wedge, not only into the T.U.C., but also between the T.U.C. and the Labour Movement.

I forecast that if such a dangerous resolution is carried it would give a tremendous knock to an already extremely delicate economic situation for the country, and would inevitably affect people's attitudes to the future plan for our Industry, I feel a lot of the plans would be shelved, particularly the ones needing financial support, and that this Labour Government, much against its will, would be forced to introduce statutory legislation to deal with wages.

If such ideas as contained in these resolutions are stemming from feelings of militancy, I must remark that it is not militant to be seen to be trying to split the

Movement; it is not militant to create feelings of insecurity in the Industry, to create once again a feeling of uncertainty amongst our members. But, worst of all, I do not believe that it can be termed "militancy" when we are trying to do something which may endanger the life of the Labour Government.

Because, although we may disagree with the way in which the Chancellor is trying to deal with the emergency which exists, or even with the approach of the T.U.C. on the issue, we cannot disagree with the fact that there is a serious economic emergency existing. This is affecting everyone in the country, not only the work people, but more so the sick and the injured and the retired people. The value of their money is falling as rapidly as that of the miners and their purchasing power is becoming weaker and weaker.

Whilst we may spend our time arguing as to who is responsible for this position, the whole situation is deteriorating from hour to hour and if we, as a Union, can be seen to be giving a lead to the other Trade Unions in Britain by saying that we are determined to help as far as is humanly possible to solve the immediate problem, we can set an example to those vocal critics of the Trade Union Movement, who by their own actions may have caused the situation to deteriorate. I refer to the financial manipulators and other people like them, who have been selling us short in the world markets, and who need to be dealt with in the long run. There is no time for recriminations now, because whilst we are doing that we are not helping to solve the problem.

So, even at this late stage, although I know that all Delegates may be mandated from their Areas, I would ask the Area responsible to withdraw it from the Agenda. Let us rally around the need for unity. Try to trust your negotiators to get the best possible deal in the circumstances, which face us at any one time. There is no point in shackling us, and therefore if it is not possible to have the withdrawals, I would ask all the delegates to look seriously at the situation, and make sure your votes do not put your Union out on a limb. Let us be seen to be an important part of the whole Labour and Trade Union Movement.

In this way I believe we can once again prosper if we approach the whole position on a united front. If we are determined to insist that the country rely on indigenous fuels for our future energy requirements. If we are determined to get the maximum from all the machine tools which have already been installed in British Factories and works. If we are determined to make the best efforts, then there is nothing this country cannot do. Now that means, of course, that Boards of Directors and other people, who are at the moment running scared and investing money in other countries, should start looking once again quite seriously at the Home field and start putting their money where many of their mouths are at the moment and instead of shouting "wolf", should be willing to put their money into British Industry and provide those necessary machine tools, without which the British can never hope to compete with their European colleagues.

Having said that, it has now been decided as a result of our Referendum, that we will be more closely associated with our European colleagues. That is why I say that we have to compete in these markets, that we have to compete in unit costs. The more we are associated with them does not solve our problems for us. They will not be the milch cow any more than anybody else and we will have to put our economic problems right of our own accord and not hope that just being a member of the European Economic Community will solve these problems. We have to solve them in competition with these other eight countries of the E.E.C. They will not continue to hand out money just to help us to solve our problems. We will have to fight for it like all the other countries of the Community. That is why we have not only got to tackle the problems inside the country, but we have to tackle the problems that are associated with our being part of the Community.

I am pleased that the British Labour Party and the British Labour Members of Parliament have decided immediately to send representatives into Europe. In that way, the Socialist Movement in Europe can be the biggest single political unit within that Community and so many of the policies which are going to be argued about within those Committees will inevitably be the policies, the collective policies of the Socialist Parties of Europe.

The Trade Union Movement also must get involved more closely with our neighbours in Europe. We have got to create an identity of purpose there if we are going to make a success of that Community. We can work together for so many ideals because the Trade Union Leaders I have met in Europe have the same ideals which we have. It may be that they don't have the same forthright approach at times, which many of us have, but that is a European trait and it is only by being in those Committees and arguing and discussing with them the ideals of Trade Unionism, that we can ever tackle the basic causes and the basic ideals which the Trade Unions were first set up to fight for.

It is in this way that I say to my colleagues that we also as a Union have got to accept the fact that our place is in these Committees in Europe. Arguing about the points of view which we have established over the years, our approach to energy matters, our approach to social security matters, safety factors, etc., and I hope, as a result of discussing with them these issues, arriving at a common line of approach, both on energy and on the Social Services, the Social Security issues which we feel should be established on behalf of our members who need such assistance.

I believe that we have a big job to do and a tremendously urgent part to play because I am seeing a slight change in the last 12 months on the energy fronts as established in the E.C.S.C. Committees. I remember in the first 12 months, when we were in these Committees, we had a terrific struggle, along with our colleagues from the National Coal Board and the other Unions, to get the British point of view accepted, i.e. that there should be a bigger emphasis on the Coal Industry in the energy plan for Europe. We fought a terrific battle and were in my opinion, winning, but unfortunately as a result of a resolution, which was carried last year with a narrow majority, and which was perhaps carried for the wrong reasons, we had to withdraw from the Committees and our voice, not being heard, has, of course, not been listened to and any notice taken of our thinking. But I am finding a disturbing trend in the approaches to the energy problems of Europe. They, of course, like us are affected by the oil situation. They, of course, like us are having to look around for other methods of energy or means of energising their Industries and unfortunately instead of putting more and more emphasis on the coal which is still available in Europe and even in Britain (because we are members of the Common Market at this time) it seems from the plans that they are envisaging a bigger and bigger proportion of the energy market being supplied from Nuclear Energy. Now I am the first to admit that within the modern world, there will inevitably be an emphasis on the production of Electricity from Nuclear Power. It is the modern thing, but it can only ever be the truly modern thing when all the snags have been ironed out, when all the problems of producing Electricity from Nuclear Power have been finalised and safest possible methods have been ironed out, when all the problems of producing Electricity from Nuclear Power have been finalised and the safest possible methods have been established. None of these is yet so apparent that people should imagine that we should risk the supply of 60 to 70 per cent of our Electricity needs from this course of energy. Not only have the production snags not been finally wiped out, but there is still a lot of work to be done in ensuring the safety of the population from many possible leaks during the production periods. But there is something a lot more frightening behind the scenes than ever that.

There was a Television Broadcast a few weeks ago dealing with the problems of providing Electricity from a Nuclear source. This showed that one of the things which is inevitable is that by producing Electricity from this source, the end product or the residue must provide the material from which Hydrogen Bombs can actually be made. This means that the production of Electricity from Nuclear sources may spread across Europe, the Middle East, the African countries and even eventually to the South American countries. Look at the vast potential there is there for some people who may not always see eye to eye with other parts of the World, being determined to hive-off some of that material in order to make themselves some Hydrogen Bombs with which to threaten other adjacent countries to accept their point of view in politics and economics.

This is a very frightening factor and one which we should all have seriously in mind when we are looking at the function of Trade Unions. It is my candid opinion that because of this and many other factors, we need a closer relationship with our own colleagues in Europe and with Miners' Unions in every part of the World. The disaster which happened only a few weeks ago in Houghton Main Colliery in Yorkshire, once again should also illustrate the urgency of this.

We have a lot of factors on safety, which need investigation and we need the united knowledge of Mineworkers everywhere in the World if we are to solve the problems on such issues as dust, methane, intrusions and all the things which make mining still a very unsafe industry. We need discussions about these and we need, as I have said, the expertise of all the other Miners' Unions if we are to be seen to be doing our job as a Trade Union movement. It is no good to keep emphasising the need for more and more production if we are not at the same time just as enthusiastic in our efforts to make Mining safer than it is at the moment — and the safest possible industry.

There are still far too many deaths and serious injuries in the British Coal Mining Industry, and although the figures may have shown some improvement, the recent accident I have just referred to should illustrate the need to do away with false complacency and the need for more vigilance. There is a continuing need for the Union to keep impressing on every member that it is the responsibility of every single individual to ensure that the safety regulations are being fully observed by every worker in or around our Collieries. There is no room for approaching things in a familiar way because that leads to contempt for the regulations. The saying "familiarity breeds contempt" should have no place in a Miner's vocabulary, and it is our duty as a Union to be willing to spend more and more of our income on educating our members on safety issues.

This is part of our job, just as much as production. We cannot shift this responsibility. That is why I am proud of the International obligations which we as a Union undertake, the necessary talks we have with Unions in every part of the World, the Delegations we invite over from countries like India and Turkey and other developing countries because we can only hope that by educating them, we can show them that mining can be a safer job of work that it is considered to be in these other countries and which it is still seen to be in countries like Britain. We, as I have said, must never apologise for our International contacts because there is another facet in the International field. The contacts that we have, both with East and Western European countries deal with other matters, along with wages and safe working conditions — and I talk now about the social security side of life, the side of life which makes a Miner's or any working man's life better when he is away from work, the social security problems he may face when he is injured at work or he is too sick to attend work, when he is too old for work and has to retire. These are common problems in every other country and have been approached differently in every country. We need to get a common consensus of opinion, so that every country will be seen to

have the same ideals, the same objectives and the same time scale for their achievements.

This I believe, is the way that Trade Unions can work together to create a common platform from which we can put pressures on politicians. We need political decisions as I have said earlier for solving the energy problems. We need political decisions to create that Socialist life, which we all desire for our members. If the Trade Union and Labour Movement can join together throughout Britain, throughout Europe and throughout the World, I feel sure that we can see a happier life ahead, a life free from want, a life free from hunger and a life strong in the political beliefs for which we stand. It is from ideals such as this that the Trade Union movement was formed. It was to put on the Statute Books laws which would make these ideals possible, for which we formed the Labour Party. We should never apologise as a trade union movement because of our political affiliations, because without them we would be very slow in reaching the ideals which we have for the people we represent. It is by united Trade Union action that we can find the right places to put the right political pressures in order to fight not only for the ideals I have mentioned, but to ensure that the world can live in peace, country by country, so that we as workers' representatives can ensure that the efforts which we put into solving the problems of the working-class will not be wasted because of some people's willingness to take to warlike methods to solve their problems. This is our task. It is a task to which I am committed and a task to which I know most of you are committed, and I would hope it is a task to which the whole of the membership of the N.U.M. will find themselves committed more and more in the future, because we all, I am sure, want to create a better world for people to live in, a place where our children and our children's children can exist in peace with other families in the world, a world fit for everyone to live in.