

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

MR. M. McGAHEY (Vice-President): Conference, it is my pleasure to call upon the President, Mr. Joe Gormley, to deliver his Presidential Address. Joe Gormley.

CHAIRMAN: Well, because this possibly might be my last Conference I decided I would try to be non-controversial, which is usual for me, anyway.

Ten years ago, I made my first Presidential Address to the National Conference and this is, therefore, my eleventh Annual Conference Address, and much of what I said that ten years ago is still relevant today. We were, at that time, suffering from the aftermath of the attack on the Coal Industry which, during the '60s, saw the Industry lose two-thirds of the jobs. I spoke, at that time, of the growth in the market for coal, but still that we were over-producing and, therefore, this was causing a problem. The problems of the '60s had been brought about by policies which had seen a growth in the use of so-called cheap oil and a flight away from coal which had played such an important role during the war and in the years immediately after the war, to fuel the industries of Britain. These decisions by the consumers had been taken against the advice of the N.U.M. who had said that it was committing political and economic suicide to fuel the industries of Britain by imported energy.

Since that time, we have been consistent in our insistence that we should have an energy policy accepted by Britain, taking into account all the energies we have available. Since 1970 we have found North Sea oil and gas and produce a certain amount of nuclear energy electricity to boost our self-reliance for energy. What happened in 1973 proved that our forecast in 1959 was a correct analysis of what was likely to happen. Oil prices rose by five times in that year and caused a worldwide economic recession from which the industrial world has not yet recovered. Those people who were producing this oil decided they could no longer keep producing that oil and selling it cheaply to increase the standard of living in other countries to the neglect of their own economies, and there was also the political advantage of using their predominance of the energy needs in the highly industrialised markets.

That led to the position that arose in 1974 when under a Labour Government, it was decided that we would have an exercise to look at the energy position in Britain and, in particular, the Coal Industry. This was a tripartite exercise representing the Government under the Chairmanship of one of our own miners' M.P.s, Mr. Eric Varley, the Coal Board and the Unions. As a result of that examination, we came out with a report — namely "Coal Industry Examination 1974". In that Report, it envisages a continual growth in the production facilities of the National Coal Board to the tune of approximately 4 million tons of new coal a year, which would mean the sinking of new pits, exploitations of extra reserves in longer life pits. It also envisaged that many pits which were seen to be short life pits, may, on investigation, have their productive life extended. This policy was accepted by all the political parties of the country without any dissent and it meant that the finances necessary to make the Plan a success would be fully supported by the Government of Britain. Clause 78, which I quote, "We welcome the establishment of a financial framework for the industry which will give it the objective of long-term competitiveness while covering its costs of production and contributing towards financing the new investment programme, but at the same time recognising the special burdens of the past, the need to provide safeguards against short-term fluctuations in the price of competing fuels, and the need to

take appropriate action if other public policies prevent commercial pricing or impose exceptional burdens on the Board'', firmly establishes the fact that there would be need to provide safeguards against short-term fluctuations in the price of competing fuels.

That was why, one year ago, we argued against the 1980 Coal Industry Bill because we said it would place drastic financial restrictions on the Board which would make it impossible to fulfil the targets of the 1974 Bill and would help to destroy the credibility of the '' Plan for Coal''. And here we should say to the Government that although they keep expressing their support for the '' Plan for Coal'' the very indecision to agree with the Coal Board's plans to sink new mines in areas like the Vale of Belvoir have not given any credibility to the statements of support . We should demand from them immediately that they give the go-ahead to this important exercise of the National Coal Board which will make it possible for them to meet the targets in the '' Plan for Coal''.

Since this was written, of course, it has become a little common knowledge I received a letter from the Minister which said he had not made his mind up. The same blinding night he had it in the press that he had made his mind up. I think it is complete duplicity for us to be treated in this way. I think it is shocking for a credible Union like ours to be treated like that, and I hope that we can convince that Committee on Thursday to take no notice of the recommendation of the Environment Minister but get on with the job of making sure that coal is going to be available in the future for Britain.

Of course, that 1980 Coal Industry Bill became law and the Board, as a statutory body, were bound to try to make the financial restrictions work. The N. U. M. knew there was bound to be trouble — that is why we were not surprised at what took place when rumours from the coalfields caused me, as President, to demand a meeting with the National Coal Board to go into the true economic position of the Industry as it was affected at that time.

It is now old history that this meeting took place on the 10th February when we indicated unanimously that we could not support the Coal Board because it seemed that they, in their willingness to make the 1980 Bill work, were bound to try to cut back any expenditure, both on development and on other issues, and, in fact, they were suggesting that we could deal with some of the financial problems by prematurely closing some pits which would anyway be closed over the next three or four years. As I have already said, we, the N. E. C., unanimously rejected that approach.

At the same time, because of the recession, the country was facing an 8-9 per cent drop in energy demand and, therefore, the forecast for the Coal Industry was lower whilst, at the same time, there was an indication from the consumers that they wished to import more and more coal from countries which had coal to spare because of the drop in energy demands in the whole of the Western world. The plans were, at that time, to import between 9 and 10 million tons of coal whilst, at the same time, saying that we would have to close some of our pits and, in fact, stock some of the coal.

Now we, as a Union, had been arguing for one or two years that we should have the same help as other coalmining industries in Europe, particularly in West Germany, France and Belgium — to compete with this cheap coal which was available for import. We said Clause 78, which I have mentioned, should be invoked to cover us in this exercise — something we have been arguing with other previous Ministers as well as the present Minister as a way of solving the import problem. We said it is in the interest of Britain that we should have a maximum coal industry and to not have the industry continually under threat because of short-term fluctuations. We needed also to find export outlets for any excess coal that we were producing. It was this threat of import and the inability to have growth in the export market which were determining factors covering the Board's position and we said, as a Union, "No way. Enough is enough. We are not having another repetition of the '60s. We will fight to keep our Coal Industry as one of the main sources of energy in Britain." We said that it would be important that we have this big coal industry able to provide the majority energy needs of Britain in future years.

I would like to say, as a result of that pressure, that we have been able to cut the import market down from the projected 9-10 million tons to an irreducible level, at the moment, of approximately 3 million tons and we hope with our united determination we will bring that down within the next year to approximately 1 million tons. At the same time, through pressure on the Board (and here I must give credit to the Marketing Department), we have been able to create the export market from 3½-4 million tons which was first projected to approximately 9 million tons of coal and 1 million tons of coke. So you will see that the Union was pretty successful in getting the Government and the Board to see the error of their ways and we must continue to use pressure in a proper way to ensure that we have no lowering of the position of the Mining Industry.

In that 1974 Act, it placed certain commitments upon the members of the Union and we accepted that challenge. It meant we had to increase production and O.M.S. which we are already being successful with. It needed us to tackle the problem of absenteeism; it meant we had to introduce, or seek to introduce, an incentive bonus scheme; and on all those issues, we have been pretty successful and are continuing that success. And that is why, at the beginning of this year, we prevailed upon our Branches to sit down with Management to have a look at their own collieries to examine and see if it was possible to bring out viable plans to make a success of the collieries. If, of course, it was found impossible to bring out a long-term plan for the pit because coalmining is an extractive industry, we should not bring forward silly plans — we should put up plans that would stand up to examination and prove to the public of Britain that we invest their money wisely in the interests of the Coal Industry; in the interests of the people who work in the Industry; and also in the interests of Britain. We did not say there would be no pit closures. We said normal consultative procedures would apply, against the position the Board had put to us which they subsequently withdrew under

the promise by the Government that they would review the financial structures of the Industry.

These normal consultative procedures are taking place and I must emphasise all the time that the question whether men should work in conditions that would apply in collieries or could apply in the future is a decision which must remain with the men at the collieries. No way should we start using a big whip to say that men must work in certain conditions, regardless of their feelings. They must, at the colliery, at all times, be the start to the consultative procedures.

All this work which the Union has been involved in in the last ten years, has been with a view to making our Industry the backbone of British economy and I must admit that we have lifted the status of the miners in a fantastic way during that period. Ten years ago nobody wanted to know us. Now everybody seems to want to be related to a miner which, in itself, is a good omen, when you get accepted and have the sympathy of the public.

During our arguments for increases in productivity, we have, at all times, been aware of our responsibilities for the safety of our members and I must say that the figures, at the moment, of fatalities and serious accidents have been on the mend during that period. I do not want to be complacent about safety and we must teach our members not to be complacent on the issues of safety. Safety is of paramount importance to the members and must always remain that way. We ask all the members working in the pits to realise that here also they have a part to play in ensuring that the mining regulations are safely carried out.

Again I want to draw your attention to the continued success of the C.I.B.T. Scheme. This was set up so that all widows and dependants of miners fatally injured, would be treated alike. Whilst we believe one fatality is one too many, we believe we are carrying out our socialist ideals if we make life easier for those affected wherever accidents occur. This year we have been able to look after the welfare of more and more widows and dependants and hope before long to bring into the Scheme all widows and dependants of all people who die whilst on the books of the Board. May I say a great thank you to everyone concerned in running the Scheme successfully and to all those whose contributions make it possible.

But it is not sufficient just to produce the coal and to produce it safely; it must be sold as well. Every individual should contribute to the Marketing Department and I want all the members to imagine that they are also salesmen of coal. We want to teach the public that the Coal Industry of Britain can be a safe and secure supplier of their energy needs. That is why I want to be very careful when we discuss resolutions on the Annual Conference Agenda each year. We do not want to give potential customers the feeling that they cannot be guaranteed supplies of coal if they decide to change to coal. We cannot frighten our potential customers whilst exhorting them to put their faith in our Industry. We do not need resolutions on the Agenda which are threatening industrial action at all times. We need sensible, serious resolutions for discussion

which cannot be used as a platform for those who are still anti-coal and there are still many in the country, and many in the Government today, who would certainly like to see the weakening of the coal industry's position.

Government Policy

There is a weakening of the position for energy in general which is bound to affect the Coal Industry because the Government's policies are causing so much unemployment and so many firms are going into liquidation that the inland consumption of energy will inevitably be affected and coal, in particular, if we are not careful. A year ago we had a figure of 1.5 million unemployed; now it is more than 2.6 million and, in fact, if the true figure was known, it would be over 3 million people — potential users of energy — unemployed today. We are having people with the vast skills in their fingertips — highest degrees of technology — thrown on the scrap heap as a result of the Government's monetary policies; people who never at any time believed they would ever be on the dole and they can now see a lifetime in front of them with a loss of dignity which comes about as a result of having to sign on the unemployment register at a time when, I have said, they have all the skills that are necessary to create the wealth which Britain needs if we are going to be able to accomplish the progressive social state which we need in Britain.

The prospects for school-leavers is appalling when it is estimated that at least one out of every two school-leavers has no prospect of a job in the foreseeable future. What a waste of the potential wealth of Britain when we are having to spend the proceeds from our revenue of the North Sea Oil in order to keep people unemployed rather than have them employed producing wealth for our country instead of that wealth being dissipated. We should ask all the trade unionists and the full Labour and Trade Union Movements together, to demand from this Government an early General Election; go to the people and ask, "Are we right in our interpretation of the Mandate that we were elected to run the country on?" I suggest that they were elected to run the country (as misguided as they may have been), by the people who elected them and not to ruin the country. All I can say, as I have said on numerous occasions, "How it is possible for a Conservative Government to be elected in Britain is beyond my comprehension." If the whole of the Trade Union members and their families voted as they should have done for a Labour Government — the only Government which understands the problems of the Trade Unions, we would never have had a Tory Government. Unfortunately, millions of trade unionists must have voted for the Tories in the last Election. There is no other answer as to why the Election result was as it was and it is no good us keeping on crying over spilt milk if we cannot educate our own people that they should use their votes all the time to ensure the continuity of the type of Government which believes in social progress for the people in general in Britain and for Britain itself. They should never be kidded by false promises and they should work devoutly all the time — not only for the election of a Labour Government, but for the continuation of a Government by the Party the Trade Unions formed. If we cannot educate

them, then we will constantly be in this position where we have a Government now that only believes in unemployment being the solution to the problem (maybe as a way of weakening the Trade Union Movement) but also it does not believe in social progress because we now see and hear leaked ideas of cuts in unemployment benefits and other social security benefits as a means of straightening the balance sheet. As long as working people believe that the Conservative Government can solve the problems of Britain in conservative ways, then I am sorry to say we will never make the progress that we ought to be making in ensuring that the country is run, not for the sake of a few, but for the sake of many.

Labour Party

That is why I am appalled at the present convulsions that are going on within the ranks of the Labour Party to decide who should be Leader and Deputy Leader of the Parliamentary Party, instead of them realising that their main job is to tackle the fundamentals of the Tory Government, to be seen in Parliament to be providing the only alternative to the present Government. I am not going to join in any witch-hunt about how democracy works in the Trade Union and Labour Movements. It is sufficient for me to say to those critics of the voting system, this same system was applauded by many of them when the votes went their way. I cannot and will not condemn the system through which I and all the leaders reached our present positions. Let me appeal to all the critics that their responsibilities to the Movement should cause them to be willing to attend all their Trade Union Branch meetings and if members of the Labour Party, to attend all local Party meetings. Don't stand aside and then criticise the nominations and policies put forward by those activists who take the trouble to attend all these meetings. Each and everyone should be determined to be an active participant and not a spectator.

What I hate with the present activities is the fact that certain people are working around the country with a so-called hit list of loyal members of the Party who have to be, in some way, attacked or removed. In fact, I noticed from one recent statement that the present leader, Michael Foot, could be on that list. If I was an outsider looking in, I would be thinking I was reading a page from the history of the Mafia and not the Labour Movement.

However, the job of the Labour M.P.s selected by those same representatives is to show the people of the country now, the follies of them having voted for the Tory Government and also to provide alternative policies which will decide the popular votes and attract these votes whenever the Election comes along. We have no time for personalities and we should say to our colleagues in Parliament, "Get on with the job that you were elected to do", i.e. to put the views of the Labour Movement in front of the country and oppose the policies which are now being used by the Government to try to ensure continuity of a Tory Government. It is for us to say (i.e. trade unionists) that we have no time for internal squabbles. We have got to ensure that whenever we get the chance to be elected, the Labour candidates get elected on the basis

that we will have a Labour Government which can control the country and solve the problems in a socialistic way — not in pipe dreams, but in surely realistic ways which would ensure forevermore a Labour Government being elected time after time after time and not just being elected for one short session. The voters of Britain are very fickle people, but we have got to educate them that there is only one true Government for the working people of Britain and that is a Labour Government bound to change the whole economic structure of the country and provide progressive and socialist ideals which our forebears would have been putting forward. We need that type of Government which understands — a type of Government which will fight at each and every corner for those ideals which we keep expounding in our Conference resolutions time after time after time but which we are not able to put on the statute book because many times we get Labour Governments elected with a very infinitesimal majority. It should be our endeavour at the next Election to ensure we return a Labour Government with a sufficient majority to put forward those ideas we keep preaching about and have preached all these years.

I wish to say that at the next Election the present Leader of the Party should be returned with an overwhelming majority and it means that all trade unionists accept their responsibilities so that we will never again be put into the position of having a Government elected which has forgotten to believe in people — forgotten that Britain is populated with people who many times need help. Therefore we should say, as trade unionists, to our colleagues in Parliament, "Get on with your job — get on with the opposition to the Government's policies — show the people of Britain we have the alternative good policies and in that way we will fight off all the oppositions which seem to be abundant if you listen to the national press — prove to the country that if they elect a Labour Government with a big majority, we shall be able to show real progress in the future for the betterment of Britain and for each and every one of the citizens of this great country of ours". As a Trade Union Leader who believes in this country, I take the responsibility to carry out this pledge.

Peace and détente

But it isn't sufficient to just think that everything starts and ends with Britain alone. We have got to be seen to be playing our part in bringing commonsense to the world. There is no future in the Trade Union Movement believing in Britain that as long as we are alright, the whole world is okay too. We have got to realise that there are areas of the world at the moment where conflict is becoming an accepted pattern in everyday life. We have got to say to the politicians, "For God's sake let's get on with the job of trying to create an atmosphere of peace in the world". In no way can we, as trade unionists, think that we are doing well for our members and yet allow to exist a climate as it is today. There is no future for any of our members or the people of the world unless we can get the acceptance of the necessity of universal peace and that can only be achieved, in my opinion, by first of all getting common agreement on the need for complete multilateral disarmament. As long as country after

country is stockpiling the terrible weapons of war, there will never be peace in the world because as long as people make arms and are allowed to keep supplying those arms to the different countries of the world, there will always be someone who wants to use them; whether we are talking about conventional or nuclear weapons, the end product is the same. But we have seen war after war (and there are still many around the world) with people using conventional weapons and the fatality rate is an indictment on the lot of us. The wars that have been started in the names of such things as politics and religion and for the ability to have possession of energy which is all many countries dream about, is a guarantee that never will we be able to enjoy the fruits of our endeavours unless we put a stop to this arms race today.

But the threat from ordinary — what you call — conventional weapons, is nothing compared with the terrible threat which exists in the world; that is the ever-growing stockpile of nuclear weapons which all the countries, both East and West, seem to delight in, for all the Power Blocs seem to be trying to outdo one another both in their ferocity and size. We even have now the threat of what we call the neutron bomb which would have the effect to leave all the businesses and buildings standing, but yet destroy all the people. What the hell are they trying to achieve? Are they trying to achieve a world in which robots will be the only residents on earth; kill off all the human beings and have all the buildings standing? What value is that to anybody? It is appalling to think that we already have stockpiled around the world sufficient nuclear weapons to destroy the world ten times over — destroy every country and destroy every Tom, Dick and Harry in the communities. It's a blinding hideous position for the world and we have got to stand up and say, "Far enough — no farther". There is no satisfaction to be gained in keeping on building on to that stockpile because if we keep building on to the stockpile, more and more countries, both small and large, will be getting hold of the expertise to build one of the so-called smaller bombs which destroyed Nagasaki and Hiroshima. It is claimed that any scientist with a smattering of knowledge can gain, from the text books, the whole procedure for building such a bomb from the residue which is left when electricity is being produced in a nuclear power station, and there are more and more countries which are determined to spread to other countries the ability to build a nuclear power station.

The potential hazard is inevitably greater and greater. More and more fingers will be on the triggers — more and more buttons will be available to many parts of the world which we, at the moment, consider pretty unstable. Look at the threat to humanity if anybody should inadvertently say, "Well, we have all these buttons; we have all these things; we've never seen them work; let's try one out". The catastrophe that would follow such a decision — and nobody can say it is not possible in today's climate — would mean the end for the lot of us and all our ambitions as trade unionists on the social progress needed to make the world a better place to live in, will become null and void.

I have one regret. As I am coming to the back end of my useful life as

President, it is the fact that we have not been able to get the whole of the mining fraternity assembled around one Conference chamber in order that they could agree a common strategy on peace and detente which we could then put to the wider Trade Union Movement and then put the pressure on the politicians and say, "This madness has gone on long enough. Let's call a halt to it." The sooner we can do that, the sooner we will start being really respected for what we are — the people who are organised to protect the welfare of working people of the world and through that the sensible, safe way of life which will bring about a united peace. We should be dedicated to this because I am firmly convinced that because of the failure of the politicians over the years and even over the centuries to seek commonsense on these power arguments, the united Trade Union Movement has got to speak with one voice. Let's forget our own political divisions; let's get fully au fait with the idea that we represent working people, whichever country our members happen to live in; let's forget about the politics of our own country when we look at this terrible hazard that faces the world, and be determined that we will speak with the sanity which, at the moment, is not apparent in many of the political scenes.

Therefore I say to you, you have a great task ahead. I hope, before I finish, we can get off the ground the Conference at least of the mining unions of the world and hope that our other trade union colleagues, through their own international machinery, can take the same initiative too. We have to do this. We have got to be determined to do it because we are the people who represent the organised working people. We have a voice to be heard and we have a part to play. I can only wish you every success and hope that we can look back with pride on the last few years in the knowledge that the miners in Britain — and I am sure the miners in the world — have a better name now than they had only a decade ago. By our own efforts we can ensure we have the ability to create:—

- (a) a bigger and safer coal mining industry in Britain providing real security of tenure;
- (b) a more humane Britain whose voice for peace and progress will be listened to and respected in the chambers of the world;
- (c) a far better and safer world in which the stronger countries can help more and more the weaker emerging countries;
- (d) the determination to eradicate world poverty to create a world of equal opportunity and, therefore, a better world to live in.

These must be the objectives of this great Union as we prepare to step forward into a new era.