

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

MR. M. McGAHEY (Vice-President): Fellow delegates, visitors and friends, it is with a great deal of pleasure I call upon the President, Mr. Arthur Scargill, to present his Presidential Address. Mr. Arthur Scargill.

MR. A. SCARGILL (President, N.U.M.): Mr. Vice-President, comrades and friends:

Last December I was elected President of the National Union of Mineworkers, and in April this year began my term of office. The substantial vote for me, unprecedented in our Union History, was a demand for a break with the past, a demand from the membership for a different kind of leadership. It was an emphatic vote in favour of the policies I supported during the election campaign and the manner in which I would pursue them. The election campaign itself enabled all miners to see and hear at first hand the candidates and the policies they advocated. I am confident that those who voted for me knew the distinction between the policies of the past and my concept and vision for the future of the Union and the industry.

It is necessary for me to repeat the essential parts of my election programme — if for no other reason than to show consistency on my part. I said and did nothing during the election which could be construed as a gimmick, simply intent on winning support. I made it clear to the membership that I would not compromise my policies, nor prostitute my principles in order to win the job. I have no intention of allowing the job to frustrate my intentions. It has often been said before — on many occasions by my predecessor — that there is an enormous difference between campaigning for the position and actually doing the job because the “buck” stops with the President.

I do not underestimate either the Constitution of the Union, nor any constraint with which I have to contend, but I do not accept that these should be reasons for not being true to one’s word.

During the course of the campaign, I outlined a programme which took account of the worst economic crisis in living memory. There are over 4 million unemployed, and we have the most vicious Tory administration in modern times, who are determined to destroy effective Trade Unionism in Britain.

It is because of these factors that I was determined to see a sensible programme agreed and operated in our industry.

The first priority for the Union is to protect the Coal industry from the ravages of the market mechanism, the short-sightedness of politicians and the deliberate political decisions designed to destroy our industry, jobs and communities. If we do not save our pits from closure, then all our other struggles become meaningless! I do not subscribe to the philosophy of John L. Lewis, who encouraged contraction so that the wages of those who are left could be raised. A contracting industry is a negative force with negative consequences all round. This was clearly seen during the decimation of our industry in the 60s when our leadership acquiesced to the most savage butchery ever inflicted. We saw over 500 pits closed and half a million jobs lost, and yet our wages fell to an insulting level — at the

bottom of the “Wages League”. Unemployment increased among miners — our working conditions deteriorated — we were working longer hours than in 1919, and there was a widespread demoralisation which led to a mass exodus from the industry.

The record of our Union in opposing pit closures during this period can only be described as “abysmal”. Throughout the 60s, the leadership accepted and in many cases, collaborated with the Coal Board as well as Labour and Conservative Governments whose policies led to miners becoming “industrial gypsies”. The Union showed in February 1981 that a programme of closures could be stopped, although we have not so far demonstrated that we can deal with “a closure programme by stealth”. The N.C.B. has succeeded in closing over half the pits on the original closure list outlined to the N.U.M. in February 1981.

I said in my election campaign that no pits should be closed other than on the grounds of exhaustion, and I reiterate my determination to uphold that statement. It is a policy which is justified on both economic, political and social grounds. It would, however, be irresponsible on my part to suggest that the N.U.M. could stop pit closures without supporting measures. The only effective long-term way of preventing pit closures is to adopt policies which embody the main elements to sustain the industry. We cannot, and must not, accept any pit closure unless on the grounds of exhaustion. In addition we must demand an Investment Programme enabling all existing collieries to be fully developed, thus exploiting their potential to the full. Furthermore, we have to win a commitment from the Government and Coal Board to sink at least 30 new pits — both as new and replacement capacity for an industry which loses capacity each year as a result of natural exhaustion.

I support the Coal Board’s policy for developing the Vale of Belvoir, and was appalled at the decision by the Environment Secretary to refuse Planning Permission after a long, detailed and exhausting Enquiry, which completely vindicated the application of the Board and the Union. I have every respect for conservationists — I am one myself — but conservation must be related to the needs of the economy and take account of the consequences and devastation in human terms of refusing applications similar to the Vale of Belvoir project. We need coal far more than we need the Duke of Rutland’s estate — and I trust that the latest application of the Board will not result in any more obstacles from the Duke or his “fox-hunting” friends inside and outside Parliament.

The Union has been pressing the Coal Board to start work on the Margam Project in South Wales, Musselburgh in Scotland, alongside a development programme in the Midlands, North East and the Snaith Area in Yorkshire. There has also got to be a firm commitment to fully explore and develop the massive new coalfields which exist in Lincolnshire, Oxfordshire and other parts of Britain. To make an expensive programme of this kind viable, the Government has to take steps to create an expanding market for coal. It is no good urging miners to produce more coal if decisions are taken to allow our traditional markets to be destroyed.

We need a commitment from central Government that it will underwrite a minimum output of 200 million tonnes a year — a commitment first agreed by the 1964 Labour Government — and subsequently outlined as an objective in discussions surrounding the “Plan for Coal”.

It is impossible to separate the issue of pit closures and development of the industry from our attitude to the alternative energy sources, including the reckless use of North Sea oil and natural gas, alongside the development of nuclear power. It is already the policy of this Union that all future nuclear power development should be stopped and the present nuclear programme phased out. I feel — and the Union agree with me — that nuclear power carries the horrific prospect of a “plutonium economy”. The recent appointment of Walter Marshall to be Chairman of the C.E.G.B. increases my apprehension about the Government’s future policy for the coal industry. Marshall is already on record stating that he would like to see coal’s share of the electricity market reduced from around 75 million tonnes to 40 million tonnes!

This arch supporter of nuclear power intends to develop the C.E.G.B. commitment to the nuclear industry and this inevitably means cut-backs as far as the coal industry is concerned, unless we are prepared to take action in the defence of our industry and jobs. What we need in order to avoid pit closures is the immediate introduction of a co-ordinated energy policy based upon coal, North Sea oil and gas along with other indigenous resources such as wind, solar and geothermal energy.

It is not a Luddite attitude to oppose the use of nuclear energy. It is a wise precaution, taking into account the experience both nationally and internationally of the nuclear industry.

In spite of promises over many years, we have never had an effective, rationally worked out Energy Policy, and achieving that must be our first priority.

When we are talking about measures to prevent pit closures, we are also talking about coal technology — about the development and utilisation of chemical processes to convert coal to gaseous and liquid fuels. Coal can be gasified and upgraded to produce clean fuel and substitute pipeline gas to yield a petroleum substitute. We lead the world in research into these processes yet even now, as a consequence of Government policy, major technological projects are in jeopardy. We support the proposal for a Coal Liquefaction Plant at the Point of Ayr, and we fully expect the Government and Board to go ahead with this project and establish others. It is the Government’s responsibility to finance these schemes in the same way that they have poured massive investment into the nuclear industry. Had the same rate of investment been allocated to the coal industry, many of these schemes would now be operational! We have a long history of bitter experience with private capital in the coal industry and we do not want it returning in any guise!

During the past 20 years, major projects like the Point of Ayr have been developed with little or no thought for the people who work in the industry. All too often the motivating force has been the technological

advance itself, rather than the impact on the labour force. British miners are not Luddites, and have never stood in the way of technological advance. The mistake of this Union has been to accept technological change without question, and has allowed by default thousands of jobs to be sacrificed at the altar of major technological innovation. If we are serious about protecting the jobs of our members and job-prospects of their sons and grandsons, we should not accept blindly new techniques which result in a dramatic reduction in manpower.

Our union should welcome new technology, provided it brings with it benefits and job security for those who work in the industry. On the other hand, we should oppose vigorously new innovations which threaten jobs and job-prospects for the sons and grandsons of miners within our communities. The British Coal Industry can only be expanded and its potential fully exploited provided political decisions are taken to protect the industry from the threat of cheap imports of both coal and oil, and the uncertainty of an artificially-affected market economy.

It is nonsense to talk about relieving the coal industry of Government financial support in order to make it self-supporting, whilst we have an international market dominated by coal producers who receive massive State subsidies or use illegitimate and immoral sources of cheap labour. Although the British Coal Industry produces the cheapest deep-mined coal in the world, it cannot compete with highly subsidised German coal, with South African coal produced by black slave-labour, with American coal produced from thick opencast seams by non-Union labour, or against the background of an international coal market which is deliberately manipulated by Governments and multi-national companies. In the USA more than half the coal is produced by non-Union labour, under conditions where safety is disregarded and men and women miners treated as fodder. We have no intention of making coal competitive by following the rules of our competitors. We have standards for employment and working conditions which have been won from reluctant coal-owners, a State-owned coal industry, and out of the blood, sweat, toil and tears of miners.

These standards must be maintained — the Government has a responsibility to provide coal subsidies at least in line with those applicable in Western Europe. A subsidy for the coal industry would provide cheap energy for steel, engineering and the motor car industries. It would provide a stimulus for the economy as a whole, and contrary to what the monetarists argue, would enable Britain to begin exporting those goods and materials which are currently being systematically destroyed as a consequence of cheap imports from nations where similar subsidies already exist. We need the immediate introduction of import controls, thus protecting our industry from outside unfair competition. These controls should apply both to coal and expensive oil, currently being used by the C.E.G.B. to the tune of 6 million tonnes per year. The immediate introduction of import controls alongside subsidies similar to those applicable in Western Europe would enable this industry to embark on an expansionist programme, stop all pit closures, invest in existing collieries,

develop new mines and at the same time use the enormous coal stocks currently dominating the sky-line in Britain.

Nobody should conclude, however, that my resolve to fight closures is tempered by the conditions I have outlined. I make it clear that under no circumstances shall I countenance a closure programme. We shall never again relive the experiences of the 60s and it would be suicidal of the Government or Board to think otherwise. We are facing an immediate crisis in the industry in relation to Snowdown Colliery in Kent, but this is just the tip of the iceberg as far as the Board and Government are concerned. If this Union accepts the closure of Snowdown, or even partial cut-back of its work force, then it is tantamount to giving the "green light" to a major closure programme, along the lines of that experienced during the Robens era.

On the 19th May this year the Union demanded that the Coal Board provide a complete list of pits and plant which they intended to close, or partially close. Initially, the Board agreed to our request but later said it would be "inappropriate" to give details of individual pit closures at national level. When we met the Board on the 24th June, the Executive Committee insisted that the Board honour its undertaking to provide the Union with the details of proposed closures. The Board refused to do so and as a consequence, the Union immediately withdrew from the talks.

I welcome the Executive decision to "walk out" and would urge an end to all forms of consultation within the industry, until this information is forthcoming.

In view of the Board's attitude, the Union must reaffirm its determination to oppose all pit closures and take industrial action to save Snowdown Colliery, which we see as being symptomatic of the Board's attempt to introduce a closure programme in every area of the British Coalfield.

Protection of the industry is my first priority, because without jobs all our other claims lack substance and become mere shadows. Without jobs our members are nothing — they have no power or means of subsistence, because we live in a society which penalises people who have no jobs. I hope, therefore, that this Conference will endorse my call to make opposition to pit closures is Central Task.

My second priority is to ensure that those who work within the industry are rewarded adequately in terms of wages, hours of work and working conditions. There can be no doubt that our work is vital to the whole community, it is hard and dangerous and miners must be amongst the highest paid in society. What the system pays doctors, politicians and senior managerial staff should also be paid to miners. The fringe benefits provided to senior civil servants and N.C.B. management must also be provided for those we represent.

Unfortunately, these priorities are not shared by the establishment who operate the society under which we live. We are penalised for doing dirty, hard, dangerous work and are castigated by the media and politicians when we try to alter this topsy-turvy situation. I am not prepared to allow the media to influence the decisions of this Union and if I have anything to

do with N.U.M. policy, we are going to push ahead for higher wages, shorter working hours on a yearly basis or more frequently if Conference demands it. The notion of long-term agreements favoured by the National Coal Board is not in my thinking or on my Agenda. The experience of long-term agreements in the United States is in itself sufficient to dissuade any objective Trade Unionist from pursuing this suicidal policy.

When we discuss our wage increase we must always be specific on an actual figure. It is not for me to define how much we should demand — that is the function of Conference, but I have an obligation to give leadership and advise what is required to maintain the living standards of our membership. Anything less than a basic wage of £110.00 per week would represent a decrease of the purchasing power enjoyed by miners in 1975. The iniquitous Incentive Scheme first introduced in 1978 has shown a dramatic decrease which has gone largely undetected because of the very nature of the scheme. At the commencement of the Incentive Scheme, the payment for standard task performance was £23.50 or one-third of the coalface rate. In a little over four years, there has been 33 per cent reduction in the rate payable for standard task performance and this has been reflected in the general earnings of all mineworkers.

Other resolutions which should have been conceded are gathering mould in the file of unfulfilled resolutions at Euston Road. Our Conference demanded a four-day working week in 1975, 1977, 1978 and 1979. The equivalent of a four-day working week was recommended by the Sankey Commission in 1919, and the Coal Board two years ago accepted the principle of the shorter working week, and established a Working Party to try and reach a workable formula. This issue must be prosecuted immediately by the National Executive Committee.

It is equally imperative to secure the introduction of retirement at 55 for all miners. We must insist, however, that an Early Retirement Scheme should provide financial benefits at least equal to those paid to redundant mineworkers. It is criminal that a miner who is made redundant receives thousands of pounds, whilst a man who retires after working his whole life in this industry receives the insulting sum of £500! The Redundant Mineworkers' Payment Scheme is a device to assist the Board to shed jobs and we must oppose it vigorously by demanding the same amounts for those who retire under the Voluntary Early Retirement Scheme.

It is a sobering thought to remember that the immediate introduction of a four-day working week and early retirement at 55 would result in at least fifty thousand more jobs in this industry. At the same time we must put a stop to the new social disease known as the "overtime" bug. I am sick and tired of seeing our members strive to work an eight-day week when we should be campaigning for a four-day working week, and better terms and conditions for our members. The price to the N.C.B. of our support for new technology must be a shorter working week and early retirement at 55, for only in this way can we share out work and prevent redundancies. The protection of earnings is another perennial issue which must be resolved. The present system whereby miners are transferred to lower paid jobs when they suffer disability, due to injury or disease, is both degrading

and inhuman. It is clear evidence that the employers treat our labour power as a commodity to be discarded, when it does not meet with their requirements. Many of the issues raised are already the policy of this Union — in terms of policy we have made great strides over the last decade with our Conference passing many far-sighted resolutions. Passing resolutions is clearly not our problem. Our problem is achieving them! Since 1974, we have not achieved a single wages resolution and our intentions have been frustrated on every other major issue. No matter how just our claim, how humane our intentions, we have been forced by Governments and the N.C.B. into a negotiating posture. We have not been able to obtain even partial objectives without threatening to strike. If we were dealing with a just and considerate employer, then many of our claims would have been conceded simply on the basis of elementary justice.

The claim for emphysema and bronchitis to be classified as industrial disease, our demand for a decent living pension for those who have already retired would all have been conceded by a fair and just employer, bearing in mind that most of these provisions already apply in other coal-producing nations.

For many years, our Union have opposed the use of our Pension Fund for Investment overseas. Just prior to this Conference, the N.U.M. Trustees refused to accept the Investment Plan of the Mineworkers' Pension Scheme, unless overseas investments in such places as South Africa and the United States were withdrawn and Pension Funds used instead to create jobs in Britain. These funds should also be used to increase the pensions of miners who spend a lifetime in the industry and I know Conference will endorse the action taken by the Trustees.

But clearly the obstructiveness of the N.C.B. is not the only reason for our failure. We have a file of untouched resolutions in our Head Office — resolutions which have never been treated seriously despite the instructions of this Conference — even the most generous of our members must conclude that our leadership in the past has been either inefficient or purposely neglectful. I have spoken out against that leadership in the past and in my election campaign spoke about the principal ways in which it could be changed. This can only be brought about by democratising the Union and I want to explain to Conference exactly what I mean by democracy.

This Conference is, and must be, the supreme authority of the Union — the ultimate decision-making body and no matter what Judges have said or will say, the decisions of this Conference are sacrosanct and binding on the N.E.C. and the Union as a whole. No other body can speak for the members and I give an undertaking that whilst I am National President, this Conference will never be trivialised — dismissed as being irrelevant or out of touch with reality. I assure the delegates and the membership that the decisions of this Conference are binding on me, on the National Executive Committee and the Union as a whole. It must be recognised that I am not giving a personal view, but simply repeating a Union Rule. On behalf of the National Executive Committee, I give a categorical

undertaking that I will protect the powers and integrity of this Conference in all our deliberations.

I have no illusions about the responsibilities which the Presidency of this Union carries but I am equally convinced that those responsibilities cannot be executed effectively and efficiently in the interests of the members by one person alone, acting as if he were the fountain of wisdom. To be effective we need collective leadership. In order to make correct decisions, we have to draw on the knowledge, the expertise of others — we have to consult with each other.

I intend to work according to the Rules in an open democratic way and will engage in no “secret” dealings. I do not believe the membership can achieve any material gain from so-called secret diplomacy, but can in fact lose by being excluded from discussions. We have everything to gain from greater democracy in the Union, indeed, the only way we are going to fulfil the decisions of this Conference is by creating an active, informed membership — which is fully involved in the running of our great Union. We have, in other words, to create a campaigning Union.

Members have every right to demand total commitment from me as President, and to insist that I prosecute Resolutions passed at this Conference. Loyalty, however, works both ways. I also have every right to demand total support from the members of this Union. Leadership is only as strong as the backing it receives from the rank and file — and if, at the end of the day, the Union’s claims cannot be met through negotiation, we have every right to demand your backing in an individual ballot. Given that support all the demands of this Union can become a reality.

Ten years ago we achieved possibly the greatest triumph in the long history of the miners’ Union. The spirit, determination, unity of purpose and involvement which marked the great 1972 strike must characterise our every-day activities in the Union. We must campaign continually; not once a year at the time of our annual wages negotiations. We must start our wages campaign from the moment we have decided our policy, and not wait for a ballot until our demands have been rejected. We must consider balloting at the outset, to show the Coal Board and Government what we feel and intend to do if there is a rejection of our claim.

A campaigning Union must constantly inform the membership, moving around the Areas, using public meetings, leaflets, pamphlets and our national newspaper “The Miner”. We must improve and extend education facilities to our membership, equip them to collate information, analyse and draw policy conclusions from it, and make them more efficient protagonists of Governments and the National Coal Board. We have taken a decision to launch a new-style “National Miner” and I am convinced we can produce a newspaper which can counteract the vile propaganda which appears every day in the “Sun”, “Mail”, “Mirror”, “Express” and the rest of Fleet Street’s garbage. Once the thirst for knowledge begins to grow, it knows no bounds, and will spill over the limits of parochial pit matters, extending to wider political issues. It will enlighten our membership and produce a campaigning miners’ Union,

which will act as a catalyst in the Labour and Trade Union Movement, both nationally and internationally. It is logical that we should be involved in matters other than mining, for the degree of success we have in our own industry depends on the economic and political context within which it and we operate. The development and expansion of our industry is inextricably tied up with the general situation. We cannot ignore an economic and political situation where production is stagnant, unemployment criminally high, where education, health and social security provisions have been systematically destroyed. We cannot stand apart from the struggle by workers for political power. I believe, for example, that the enormous cost of the Falklands crisis will directly and indirectly imperil the survival of the Coal industry, and industry generally. In order to pay for this mad adventure of colonialism, the Government will produce yet another round of closures as our share of the burden.

We have therefore to be politically alert and involved in all the discussions and arguments in the T.U.C and Labour Party. There can be no solution to our problems without political action. We cannot, by ourselves, tackle the enormous problem of unemployment — to solve that problem we need to get rid of the Government which is using unemployment as an Incomes Policy and as a means to weaken the Trade Union Movement. Unemployment is an evil and should be condemned by any society that calls itself “civilised”. If we charted the physical and mental consequences of unemployment over the last three years, if we listed the deaths, the suicides, mental breakdowns, the debilitation caused by poverty, the incessant unhappiness caused by uncertainty, the despair experienced by adolescents who see no future — it would amount to a crime as enormous as any perpetrated by the juntas of South America. The use of unemployment is a device of capitalism — it suggests to workers that they in some way are responsible for their own fate. It violates the basic right which all men and women must have, namely, the “right to work”.

We can eliminate unemployment and give hope to millions only if we equip the Labour Party with a Socialist policy and ensure that policy is implemented following its election. I have never hesitated to project my socialist principles and identify myself with those in and out of the Labour Party who believe in the achievement of a Socialist Society. I believe this Union must be equally clear and unashamed about its support for real socialism.

It was not my intention to make any comment on the current differences of opinion between various factions inside the Labour Party, but the decision taken by the Party’s N.E.C. to recommend the re-introduction of bans and proscriptions compels me to declare my position.

The last time we had proscriptions of this kind in our Party, it resulted in Nye Bevan being expelled and Michael Foot having the Labour Whip withdrawn.

The language used to support the re-introduction of bans and proscriptions is similar to the terminology of Shirley Williams and Roy Jenkins, who betrayed our Party and left it to form the S.D.P.

We should declare our total opposition to any witch-hunt inside the Party — the only witch-hunt needed is the one to remove the witch in Number 10, who has almost destroyed hope for millions of people.

We need unity, not division — given unity around Clause Four of the Labour Party's Constitution, we can and will win the next General Election.

The achievement of socialism depends on one extremely important factor — the ability of the Trade Union Movement to retain its freedom of action. A Trade Union Movement shackled by Tory legislation becomes emasculated. If Trade Unions are not free to protect their members — not simply in confrontation with their immediate employers, but over a whole range of issues, then their members are not free and I submit our society is not free. A free independent Trade Union is essential to protect democracy against the authoritarianism of capitalism. If Unions lose their freedom then all our other liberties are in jeopardy. History is littered with examples of Governments who wanted to crush civil liberties and in order to do this, destroyed in the first instance, effective Trade Unionism.

The Trade Union Movement must defeat Tebbit's Employment Act. Our future and that of the working class movement is at stake. There can be no half measures and every Trade Union has to be determined to ignore the provisions of the Bill, to defy the Law and render it ineffective. The policy of our Union is clear on this matter and we must turn that policy into action if we are attacked by any of the provisions of the 1980 Employment Act or the new Tebbit legislation.

This Conference must spell out to the Government and the British miners that we will maintain 100 per cent Trade Unionism, irrespective of the action we have to take. If one man enters our pits and refuses to join our Union, then we must resolve to take immediate strike action in the defence of our Union. British miners will take industrial action whenever they consider it necessary — we will use whatever methods are considered appropriate — we do not and will not recognise distinctions between forms of picketing.

We have also declared our total backing for the railway workers in their fight to retain the eight-hour day, a decent wage, and their action against the rundown of Britain's railways. We have also given our backing to the steelworkers, who are fighting against vicious cut backs in their industry. To this end we hope to reconvene the Triple Alliance National Conference as quickly as possible, in order to defend our three basic industries.

We shall support other sections of the working class, and no government, no law, no court or judges are going to compel this Union to do otherwise.

I want to conclude on an International theme. British miners have always been great internationalists and have maintained links of friendship with miners all over the world. We have taken initiatives such as the organisation of the Miners' Peace Conference in December last year. I want to continue and extend our bonds of international solidarity and to

this end we shall be participating in the follow-up Conference in Moscow in 1983.

I believe miners everywhere have a unity of purpose and there is no justification for the division which separates the Miners' International from our mining comrades in the World Federation of Democratic Trade Unions. The cold war divisions within the Trade Union Movement have gone on too long — I want to see one international body embracing every mining Union in the world, bringing together our comrades from the east together with those from the west and the Third World mining countries, thus enabling us to engage in a constant dialogue, exchanging ideas and information and providing the basis for Governments throughout the world to produce policies that will lead to nuclear disarmament and a lasting world peace.