

## PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

MR. M. McGAHEY (Vice-President): It now gives me very great pleasure to call upon the President of the National Union of Mineworkers, Arthur Scargill, to present his Presidential Address. *(Applause)*

MR. A. SCARGILL (President, National Union of Mineworkers):

FELLOW MEMBERS;

One year ago, in my first Presidential Address to Annual Conference, I outlined the issues that I believe are priorities for our Union. I pledged my total commitment to making those priorities a reality, and to turning our principled beliefs, our hopes and ideals into the practical fabric of our working lives. Today I renew that pledge.

I said, last year, that our Union's first responsibility was 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.

In the past twelve months, we have seen all those destructive forces come into the arena, and the mining industry is now facing the most acute crisis since the Robens Era in the Sixties. We have seen the loss of 12,000 jobs in the course of one year alone, and the Coal Board Chairman, Norman Siddall, has said that another 15,000 will go in the twelve months ahead. Furthermore, over the next five years, the Board and the Government have now confirmed their aim to reduce manpower altogether by 70,000!

These statistics spell out a shrinking industry, lost capacity, units and pits closed or partially closed — above all, they mean that once again the spectre of fear and unemployment pervades Britain's mining communities.

The 1982 Annual Conference in Inverness unanimously agreed to oppose the continued rundown of manpower in our industry, and pledged that unless there was an immediate reversal of the closure programme a Special Delegate Conference would be convened to decide upon various forms of industrial action in support of our industry and our jobs.

The National Executive Committee was also mandated to fight for a basic weekly wage of £115 per week for surface grades, with an across-the-board increase for all other sections of the industry.

The Union presented its case to the Board with great power and logic; but both Board and Government were impervious to the common sense and justice of our claim.

However, the Board not only refused to concede our wages claim; they made it clear to the Union that their intention was in fact to run down the industry, by reducing manpower levels and closing a large number of pits and units.

The N.C.B. "offer" on wages was, effectively, a 19/20 per cent cut in pay. This contemptuous response to our claim alongside the declared intention

to close pits resulted in the N.E.C. holding an individual ballot, recommending support for industrial action “if necessary” to prevent any pit closure, and in support of our wages claim.

The Special Delegate Conference in October had led to the Union launching the first national ballot campaign in our industry since the 1930s. I want to pay tribute not only to those who organised the five magnificent coalfield rallies, the area campaigns and local meetings, but to the National Executive Committee which committed itself wholeheartedly to winning a vote from our members.

However, the membership decided by a majority of 60 per cent to reject the leadership’s recommendation, accept the Coal Board’s pay offer, and to take no action, at that stage, against pit closures.

There were those in our Union who argued vociferously that we had lost the individual ballot vote because our wage claim was linked to the issue of pit closures. However, within a short space of time, the Union’s argument was to be completely vindicated. I trust that our experience as a National Union over the last year provides a timely lesson to all of us to fight on the principled position, rather than take what appears to be an easy option.

On the first day of November, the eve of announcing the ballot result, “secret documents” containing details of the Coal Board’s submission to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission were delivered into our hands. These documents proved conclusively that the Board had prepared a “hit list” of pits for closure, and had even divided the cost of such an exercise between what they labelled the “central” coalfields and the “peripheral” areas.

Following the ballot result and our disclosure of these secret documents, the House of Commons Select Committee on Energy decided to hold an emergency inquiry into our allegations of a pit closure programme. It called on our Union, the Coal Board, and the Department of Energy in turn to give evidence.

We went before the Select Committee in good faith. We presented our evidence in a thorough, detailed and closely argued written submission — we put an irrefutable case for a strong and expanding coal industry based on the nation’s needs, as well as economic sanity — we exposed the lunacy of running the industry down.

Our evidence showed that to close the pits projected in the N.C.B.’s submission to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission would cost the British taxpayer approximately £4,300 million over a ten-year period. However, to keep those same pits open, producing valuable coal for Britain, and to keep jobs secure would cost the taxpayer less than half that amount — approximately £2,000 million.

In spite of all the evidence, our case was set aside by the Select Committee, which wound up its inquiry by concluding that the Coal Board was not in fact closing pits fast enough! So much for economic sanity and the un-biased assessment of a Parliamentary Select Committee.

Throughout the remainder of autumn and through the winter, the Board continued to deny the existence of a closure programme. Yet, following

the individual ballot vote in October, they were at the same time implementing that closure programme more rapidly.

In February, the N.C.B. served a closure notice on Lewis Merthyr/Tymawr Colliery in South Wales. This led to unofficial action which spread like wildfire throughout the British coalfield.

The N.E.C., faced with unofficial action which was dividing the Union, agreed to call another individual ballot vote. The Executive recommended strike action in support of the Welsh pit — and of any other pit faced with closure or partial reduction in manpower levels.

For the second time in less than six months, our membership rejected the recommendation of the N.E.C. This time, though, there was only one issue on the ballot paper, and the majority against supporting action exploded the myth that it had been the linking of wages and jobs which led to the “NO” vote in October 1982.

Since that second ballot, in March, the Board have intensified their attack on the coal industry — in a second document, leaked last month to a Fleet Street newspaper, they outline plans to reduce manpower levels by 70,000 over a five-year period.

In a meeting just weeks before this Conference, the Chairman of the Board conceded to the Union that N.C.B. policy did envisage a rundown of 70,000 jobs, and a closure programme involving 70 pits or more. He made it perfectly clear that they intend to take 25 million tonnes capacity out of the industry, and do have a strategy for cutting that capacity and for axeing jobs.

They will carry out that strategy — unless we stop them. Nevertheless, we must face the fact that twice within the last year, our members have refused to back the N.E.C.’s unanimous recommendation for industrial action in defence of wages, conditions and jobs.

I believe that there are a number of reasons for that refusal, and all of them need closer analysis.

There is no doubt that the main reason was the Bonus Incentive Scheme, which has indeed put man against man, pit against pit, and Area against Area — as those of us who fought against it argued from the start. The Incentive Scheme has disunited us and set this Union back 50 years, and those who advocated its introduce are now seeing the price we all must pay.

Our members are also affected, of course, by the general economic and political situation, and fearful of their jobs against a backcloth of four-and-a-half million unemployed people. Their reaction must be very similar to that of our relatives and retired colleagues during the 1930s. Of course, this fear is exactly what the Government had hoped to achieve.

The Tories want to create a situation wherein workers are in such fear that the employer, private or public, can say to them: “You either accept the job on the terms offered, or it goes to one of the 20 people outside the factory or pit gates just waiting for a chance to work.”

But, above all, the responsibility for the two ballot results and what they

indicate lies with the Union itself, and with our failure over the past 20 years to “politicise” our membership, so that we all understand the economic policies of this or any Government, and the implementation of those policies by the National Coal Board.

All too often, trade unions have excellent education programmes which train officials and rank-and-file members in industrial matters, but which either ignore or simply scratch the surface of the real political issues involved in those industrial matters.

There can be no doubt that over recent years, the lure of redundancy payments has had and is having a heavy impact on many of our members. We must face the fact that our people are, all too often, selling the job of a son or grandson in exchange for a lump sum benefit.

But then, again all too often, our members fall into line behind local Branch officials who themselves give in to the lure of redundancy. We must ask ourselves — what sort of leadership is that? Our leaders at the pit, in the Branch, are there to fight *against* rundown and closures — not take them by the hand and must support the decisions of this Conference and the N.E.C.

This is a fundamental problem which our Union has not confronted — the time has come to stand up to it. I urge all Areas to begin without delay a complete and thorough re-think on this issue. We must convince our members that, while they have every right to demand early retirement with the same benefits redundancy brings, they do not have the right to sell their jobs and the jobs of their sons and grandsons.

We must as a National Union begin a campaign, and conduct a far-reaching educational programme to win our members wholeheartedly for the fight to defend this industry and their own jobs. I believe we have fallen into the trap of taking that wholeheartedness for granted — something we must never do again.

I repeat what I said last year: if we do not save our pits from closure, and fight for the expansion and development of our industry, all our other struggles become meaningless.

This Tory Government is anti-coal, but above all it is against *nationalised* coal. As a consequence of Government decisions, promised investment for vital projects such as the Vale of Belvoir, Musselburgh, Margam, Canonbie, Thorne and other coalfields in South Warwickshire, Oxfordshire, Lincolnshire and Kent are being delayed.

Our Union has fought for years for the development of these untapped, abundantly rich coalfields, and if investment was put into them, we should be providing Britain’s energy needs for at least 1,000 years.

But now, at a time when pits are being closed and manpower reduced, the Tories and their supporters are suggesting that they can privatise those untapped coalfields and develop them, not for the benefit of our country, but for the benefit of private profit and the multi-nationals.

Our parents and grandparents fought to win a nationalised coal industry which would be mined for the welfare of all. With nationalisation, we have

achieved the finest results in the world. I warn the Tories here and now that the N.U.M. will resist all attempts to hive-off or privatise any section of our industry — including those future coalfields.

Of course, in September, the Coal Board will have a new Chairman. I don't intend to waste much time discussing Mr. MacGregor, who we know was brought over from British Steel as Mrs. Thatcher's hatchet man, with a mandate to close pits as quickly as possible.

The Board's excuse for closing pits is "unprofitability". We know the Board's unprofitability is the result of insufficient investment, very bad planning, and lunatic book-keeping. It is accepted that Britain produces the world's cheapest deep-mined coal — yet we continue to receive a lower level of subsidy than any of our competitors, apart from the slave-labour state of South Africa, and strip-mining in the United States and Australia.

The Tory Government now plans to withdraw operating grants beyond 1983/84 which will leave the industry to borrow money on which massive interest payments must be made. We are already paying over £400 million in interest charges, the legacy of years of bad planning. For years, our industry was compelled to produce coal and sell it below the cost of production, thus depriving it of vital income.

Today, our members are breaking every productivity record, with the Board and the Government urging us on. But, at the same time, they're telling us that the industry must produce less.

In other words, the more coal we produce, and the harder we work, the quicker we are going to lose our jobs. In our insane economic system, producing more coal results in us losing our jobs, while massive stock-piles build up in all parts of the coalfield. My answer to this is to allocate free coal to all old age pensioners many of whom are at risk to hypothermia and death each winter.

The Board and the Government constantly refer us to the world economic recession. But the recession is not some international mystery, or an act of God. Now, even the Confederation of British Industry admits the Tory policies are to blame for the economic mess which faces Britain.

At a time when we have nearly 60 million tonnes of coal stocked on the ground, this Government continues to expand and develop the nuclear power programme, even though it is now admitted that a nuclear power station is far more expensive than a coal-fired one. Nevertheless, the Department of Energy projects an increase in nuclear power development from 12 m.t.c.e. to 19 m.t.c.e. — or nearly 60 per cent.

Simultaneously, they continue to import foreign oil to generate electricity — despite the fact that it costs over 30 per cent more than British coal currently stocked on the ground at an average cost of between £12 and £15 per tonne to the taxpayer.

And, on top of that, we are still importing between 4 and 6 million tonnes of coal, irrespective of the effect on our balance of payments, and oblivious to the fact that our nation is awash with energy.

The amount of imported oil and coal is equivalent to the amount being stocked each year by the British coal industry. And if the nuclear power programme with all its attendant dangers and risks were cut back to its 1970 level, then our coal stocks would disappear, our balance of payments would improve, our industry and Britain's general economic position would be considerably better.

Whilst all this is taking place, the industry and our members are facing a new threat from the technology rapidly being introduced into mining. We regard technology not as an absolute in itself but rather as a means to an end. We are not Luddites — we warmly welcome technological innovations that protect the nation's future, and improve the health, safety, and working conditions of our members. But we totally reject plans to use technology as a weapon to axe our pits, cut away our jobs, and chop down the strength of our Union.

The N.U.M. commissioned a study from Bradford University which revealed in a frightening way N.C.B. plans to use technology against the welfare of our members, our industry and the economy.

Computer technology which gives not only central control of an entire colliery, but which can handle multi-colliery complexes, could cut away 100,000 jobs by the end of the century. This is a projection which threatens all our people, clerical as well as industrial staffs.

By 1987, an annual 10 million tonnes of Selby coal will be produced by only 4,000 miners. At present, it takes 20,000 miners at conventional pits to produce that amount. Yet we still produce the cheapest deep mined coal in the world.

We want to make it clear that we welcome new technology. British science leads the world in research into new processes for coal conversion to gaseous and liquid fuels — processes which are vital for the future, especially when our oil and gas reserves start to dry up towards the end of the century.

We welcome all innovations which benefit our communities and our nation. But we will not accept machines and methods which destroy our jobs and condemn our members to the indignity of the dole queue.

New technology should usher in a new era, with retirement at 55 on the same terms and conditions the Board is happy to give redundant miners. We also demand the four-day week, first promised by the Sankey Commission in 1919 — with new technology, this could be introduced on a three-shift sequence with a 28-hour week.

We want a rate protection scheme which allows the same dignity to our members as already applies to senior and junior management. We want a non-contributory pension scheme, sabbatical leave, and a major education programme — all of which could flow freely as benefits from the introduction of new technology.

Because of the threats not only to our industry, but throughout British society, we must fight within the Labour and trade union movement for import controls, with subsidies for our products equivalent to those given

in both Western and Eastern nations. I argue that this is a call *for* international solidarity, and not against it.

Our fight for import controls is a challenge to fellow workers in other parts of the world suffering directly under imperialist repression — the Philippines, Thailand, Hong Kong, and of course South Africa. While the British market remains wide open to the multi-national corporations, the British people continue to finance the criminal exploitation of workers in those countries — as our own industries collapse around us.

The fight for import controls is linked to our fight against pit closures, and for the future.

In the battles ahead, our young members have a crucial part to play — they are our life blood, and we must use their energy and enthusiasm in every possible way. These are colleagues who were youngsters at school in the strikes of 1972 and 1974.

They have come of age in a society which appears in many ways quite different from that of a decade ago — but they share with us dreams and hopes for a better life and a peaceful world. We must use the talents of our young members to the full in building the strength and unity of the N.U.M.

Alongside the fight to save our industry we must also campaign for the other priorities — including decent hours of work, an early retirement age, and a proper wage.

According to the most recent Whitehall “leak”, the Coal Board calculates that miners’ wages will decline by 8 per cent in real terms over the next few years. This decline is on top of the 30 per cent reduction which miners have suffered on grade rates since 1978.

Conference will determine our wage claim for the coming year, and I promise you I will fight to win that claim. I was elected President not only to give leadership, but to respond to the demands and wishes of our members. I said before I was elected that I would not prostitute my principles, or compromise on policies.

I believe that over the past 12 months I have demonstrated that I am prepared to fight the Coal Board or the Government to the death if need be to save our industry, our jobs and standards of living.

But at the end of the day, my fight is only as effective as *your* will, and determination. My power, and that of the National Executive, is in your hands. I can only warn that we are dealing now with forces that intend to ride over us — and only direct action will stop them from doing that.

We can be proud of our Union’s policies, but, as I remarked last year, “While our Conference has no problem passing many far-sighted resolutions, we have very real problems achieving them.”

We continue to demand the immediate introduction of a four-day working week, which, with retirement at 55 would result in at least 50,000 more jobs in our industry. The elimination of overtime working could create a further 25/30,000 jobs. It is time that the Union grasped the nettle, stopped all overtime, and campaigned for a shorter working week with no loss of pay!

Demands that Bronchitis and Emphysema be classified as industrial disease should have been met simply on the grounds of justice and humanity — but unlike the Governments of other coal-producing nations, ours is not prepared to concede this principle.

Another urgent priority for our Union is to win a decent pension for our retired members. Although we have had some advance in the area of pensions I regard it as an improvement rather than a breakthrough or victory.

Our Conference determined last year that the billions of pounds (our members' money) invested in the Mineworkers' Pension Fund should not be taken overseas whilst British industries starve of capital funding, and that they should not be invested in alternative energy sources while British coal projects fall by the wayside.

The N.U.M. Trustees have campaigned to bring back those billions of pounds from abroad — they can also be used to increase the pensions of our retired people, and we will not shirk our responsibilities, irrespective of threats of legal action from the Coal Board's Fund Trustees.

We must not underestimate the enormous task facing the mining industry. Hard times are ahead — the election of a Thatcher Government, Mark II, means that our nation is now truly on the edge of a precipice, facing the plunge into total economic, social and political collapse.

Britain's unemployment is now worse than in any western country apart from Spain. Our "real" unemployment figure is rapidly approaching 5 million people, which means that one in five of the working population is now without a job.

Unless something is done quickly, we face an unemployment figure of 8 million by the end of this decade. I say this as someone who projected very accurately that we would have over 4 million unemployed people by the mid-1980s. This appalling waste of human resources is reflected in the stagnation and decay of the economy.

Since the Tories came to power in 1979, manufacturing industrial output has dropped by 19 per cent; industrial output is down by 12.3 per cent. There is no economic recovery on the way, nor will there be unless we have massive investment in our industries, and throughout the economy.

The rest of our society reflects the desperation of the situation. We have a Health Service unable to give proper care and treatment because it is starved of finance and vital resources. We have 700,000 people queuing for hospital treatment, and at the same time, we have thousands of unemployed doctors and nurses.

We have thousands of people, many of them in families with children, desperately needing a home; hospitals, schools and roads urgently require building or basic repair — yet we have nearly half a million building workers without jobs.

We see overcrowded classrooms and severe cutbacks in education; it becomes less and less likely that our children will get the training, learning and skills needed for both their own fulfilment and the nation's future.

Yet, on the other hand, we have thousands of unemployed teachers, told by this Government that they are “surplus to requirements”, and not needed.

Alongside the social and economic damage, the Tories have brought in legislation which literally attempts to drag us back to the dark ages. We have two Employment Acts aimed at destroying the collective strength of the trade union movement. And now Norman Tebbit's at work on something new — hoping to bring in some sort of urban serfdom with laws that not only attack the closed shop, but which would outlaw direct action such as the occupations against closures organised with such skill and solidarity in Scotland over the last two years.

We have already had a taste of the social violence that Tory policies bring to our inner cities, and we have seen the paramilitary tactics the police adopt both before and after. I believe this sort of repressive violence is going to get much worse.

The re-election of a Tory administration is a severe setback to the Labour Party, a catastrophe for Britain and the British people. We should not forget that despite their record number of seats, the Tories were re-elected with a reduced vote compared to 1979. Nor should we forget that nearly 60 per cent of the British people voted against Thatcher's monetarist philosophy.

It is interesting to recall that when the N.U.M. obtained approximately 40 per cent of the votes cast in support of our recommendation for industrial action in our two ballots over the past year, we were told (especially by the media) that we were out of touch with our members, and the result was a landslide defeat for the Union's leaders, many of whom should resign.

Yet, Mrs. Thatcher gets elected with a 40 per cent vote, and the media hails this as a landslide *victory*, a vote of confidence. She is thus able to form a Government, and if necessary take this nation to war, even though she has obtained only a minority of our support.

For that injustice, our outmoded and undemocratic electoral system is to blame — it has yet again failed to reflect popular will. I have argued and fought for 30 years — in line with what was once Labour Party policy — that proportional representation is essential to electoral justice. Its introduction would in my opinion lead to a polarisation of views, eventually electing a Labour Government with a clear majority of votes behind it. I hope this election result stirs our movement in that direction.

Of course the Tories had some powerful assistance during their campaign. Fleet Street launched a barrage of propaganda unequalled for smears and distortions — a barrage which I trust will bring shame to the journalists and print workers who made it possible. As long as our press and broadcasting media are controlled and owned by a small elite which also controls our economy, we will face this constant blockade of the truth.

Mrs. Thatcher also had help from another important source: certain leaders, past and present, of the Labour Party, whose lack of integrity and

loyalty to Party policy was quite staggering. We had throughout the election campaign the unseemly spectacle of former leaders speaking openly on Labour's platform against Labour's Manifesto. To me, this is treachery and sabotage which more than matches that of the Gang of Four and those others who joined the SDP.

But we have to look further and deeper to understand the implications of Labour's defeat in the election. We must face the fact that the hearts and minds of Britain's trade unionists, among them our members, have not yet been moved by the vision of a socialist future.

It is my contention that we need to put *politics* back into the centre of trade union activity. That does not mean altering our priorities. On the contrary, we must fight even harder for wages, jobs and good conditions. But we must infuse that fight with an understanding of how our claims and battles affect other sections of the community, and find new ways of working together wherever possible.

Our Union is already part of a framework moving towards a spirit of co-operation within the Triple Alliance. Over the past year, the savage dismantling of the British steel industry has continued unchecked. Only industrial action such as that taken by steel workers in South Yorkshire a few months ago has forced any concessions, as the Tories continue to decimate not only the public steel sector, but the private one as well.

As for the railways, the Government is now ready to move in and implement the Serpell Report, to take apart our nation's railway network, destroy jobs and turn entire communities throughout Britain into semi-ghettos without access to public transport by train.

We welcome the A.S.L.E.F./N.U.R. decision to come together in a railway federation. In my view, it is only commonsense to look for ways of developing common strategies of growth and development. To this end, we have invited the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation to discuss with us the possibility of a merger or federation which will link our two unions in the common cause of fighting for coal and for steel.

In April this year, we reconvened the Triple Alliance Conference, bringing together on this occasion all the trade unions within the coal, steel and rail industries in order to campaign effectively against the Government's strategy of destruction.

I must warn, however, that time is not on our side. Our economy is in danger, our national future in jeopardy, and our planet itself faces a countdown to destruction.

The Tory victory last month was a victory for the war-mongers who have the full support of Mrs. Thatcher and her nuclear-obsessed Cabinet.

The women of Greenham Common, and the people at other peace camps have led us into a new awareness of what is at stake in this race against time and the bomb. They fight uncompromisingly for what they believe in. They have put their lives on the line — not just for families and friends, but for all of us.

The trade union and Labour movement must match their courage and join wholeheartedly in direct action against the deployment of Cruise and

Trident missiles in Britain. The threat of nuclear war is getting stronger, and the need for workers around the world to campaign on an international scale is now greater than ever before.

In April, the Union participated in forming a new miners' international organisation — our intention is to break down all the Cold War barriers, to bring miners and energy workers from the East, the West and the non-aligned nations together in the quest for world peace. We are very proud of the fact that, together with the French miners, CGT, we sponsored and organised the first meeting of this new International in Paris.

It is in the spirit of cooperation and true internationalism that we can bring pressure to bear on our Government, and governments of the world, in the quest for peace rather than war.

However, in Britain, we have re-elected a Government which is intent on heightening international tensions and increasing the likelihood of war — a Government which, although it represents a minority of feeling in the country, will attempt to dismantle our Health Service, close down our schools, and destroy our basic industries — including coal.

We have two choices. We can give in, as many German people did in the 1930s, and allow the worst to happen — we can watch social destruction and repression on a truly horrific scale, and wait for the inevitable holocaust. Or we can fight back.

A fight-back against this Government's policies will inevitably take place outside rather than inside Parliament. When I talk about "extra-Parliamentary action", there is a great outcry in the press, and from leading Tories about my refusal to accept the democratic will of the people.

I am not prepared to accept policies proposed by a Government elected by a minority of the British electorate. I am not prepared to quietly accept the destruction of the coal-mining industry, nor am I willing to see our social services utterly decimated.

This totally undemocratic Government can now easily push through whatever laws it chooses. Faced with possible Parliamentary destruction of all that is good and compassionate in our society, extra-Parliamentary action will be the only course open to the working class and the Labour movement.

As for us — miners will have to take direct action if we are to save our industry, our jobs, our self-respect and dignity. That action will, however, only be effective if it is infused with the ideals, the hopes and aspirations upon which our movement was founded. We have inherited the dreams of Wat Tyler, the Chartists, of Keir Hardie and the suffragettes, of our own early leaders such as A. J. Cooke.

To carry out those dreams we must fight for a social framework in which all people can live and grow, work, learn and create. I ask this Conference to raise its eyes and look to a new horizon. Be prepared to stand and fight for our industry, and alongside our fellow workers in other industries.

Let us begin to practise those passionate socialist beliefs our movement preaches. If we dedicate ourselves to this end, we shall not only save our

industry — we will pave the way towards a caring and truly democratic socialist system of society.