

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

MR. M. McGAHEY (Vice-President, National Union of Mineworkers): Delegates and friends, it is my privilege and pleasure to call upon the President of the Union to present his Presidential Address. Mr. Arthur Scargill. (*Applause*)

In my Address to last year's Conference. I warned that we were facing the greatest challenge that ever confronted a British trade union.

Whilst the Tory Government and Coal Board continued their concerted attack against pits and miners' jobs, our Union was withstanding their attempts to destroy the NUM itself, and fighting against moves to establish a breakaway organisation similar to the "Spencer Union" created in the aftermath of the 1926 Strike.

Over the past four years, in the course of constant struggle against Government and Coal Board strategies, we have faced incredible odds – including the sequestration of our funds for more than a year, and the introduction, for the first time anywhere in the world, of a Receiver who has effectively controlled the Union's assets since November, 1984, to date.

In essence, the British State has attempted to hijack and paralyse this Union, to prevent us from carrying out our policies. It is a testimony to the courage and determination of our membership, to the wonderful women's support groups, and to our allies in the Labour and trade union Movement that despite all the attacks, the NUM has not only survived, but is increasingly recognised as a focal point of resistance against attempts to destroy British industry, jobs and communities.

Inevitably, our refusal to accept the Coal Board's savage closure programme has intensified the wrath of the State, which now sees the destruction of the NUM as a crucial step towards immobilising the entire trade union Movement.

In order to cope with the crisis created by international capitalism, the British ruling class requires massively high unemployment, creating a docile, passive workforce to try and achieve the death of effective trade unionism.

To that end, the State has initiated and used savage anti-trade union legislation as part of a machine involving the police, judiciary and mass media — all of which play key roles in seeking to undermine and attack any organised defence not only of jobs and communities but of basic civil rights.

Faced with the State's comprehensive mobilisation, there are those within the Labour Movement who argue that to survive we must dispense with what is described as traditional trade unionism and devise new methods.

They claim that our historical class perspective is now out-dated, and should be replaced with what is described as "new realism". This concept is not only naive, but positively dangerous — a perspective which creates a diversion from the struggle which must take place if we are to win basic social and economic change which is essential for a democratic Britain.

Let us look at the example of "new realism" in the campaign to save Gartcosh in Scotland — a vital component in the steel industry. Our members will recall how in 1984 this Union pleaded for solidarity from the steelworkers, warning that our fight for coal was inextricably linked with the need to protect Britain's steel plants.

When the axe fell on Gartcosh, a broad-based campaign to save it was mounted across Scotland, drawing in the widest possible range of political and social views. Indeed, it even involved the Scottish Conservative Party, with several leading Tories playing a prominent part in a strategy portrayed as the "effective" alternative to industrial action.

Don't get me wrong: I am all in favour of adopting fresh tactics and forging new alliances wherever possible in seeking to achieve our basic and fundamental goals.

But let there be no doubt that only those alliances which *agree* on basic and fundamental goals will accomplish anything: only those tactics based on shared principles will have any effect.

I find it interesting that the Gartcosh campaign, and the lessons to be learned from it, did not attract any of the lengthy and exhaustive analyses that all aspects of the miners' strike did. One crucial lesson, surely, is that with this Government, no amount of "new realism", persuasion, or silent protest will shift it from a strategy of destruction.

Only direct action which carries economic impact can halt the policies and terrible slide to complete disaster which faces Britain today. That is a key lesson learned over the course of the past few years.

Capitalism is in deep crisis, and our enemies know — even if some in our Movement do not — that only effective trade unionism can defend the interests of the working class and its allies, whose lives are in every sense damaged by this worsening crisis.

Along with mass unemployment, we see growing conflict and despair throughout Britain. On a global scale, political leaders such as Reagan and Thatcher seem prepared to sacrifice humanity itself in defence of capitalist and imperialist philosophy.

This is the reality we face; to accommodate or attempt to placate it is to surrender. The only effective action is to mobilise and fight against it. Only a regeneration of basic trade union principles — embodied so magnificently in the miners' strike — can combat and defeat the attacks mounted by the Tory Government against the people of Britain.

Let there be no doubt that the year-long struggle of the teachers, the magnificent defence of trade unionism sustained by the Silentnight workers, and the heroic printers' battle against News International have all drawn determination, inspiration and solidarity from the miners' strike.

It would be a fundamental mistake to think that our enemy is merely "Thatcherism". The enemy of the working class and its allies is unadorned capitalism, and conflict with a ruling class determined to exploit, manipulate and destroy is inevitable. As I have already said, we can either surrender or fight back. There is no middle ground.

For the NUM, that fight begins with saving our industry, pits and jobs. There can be no ambiguity on this central issue. It is the responsibility of this Union to convince each and every member that short-term redundancy benefit is no substitute for the job that belongs not just to the worker of today, but to the worker of tomorrow and the generations to come.

We fight not only for pits, jobs and communities, but for nationalisation itself. The hopes and dreams of Vesting Day centred on a democratically run coal industry, operating on behalf of the British people. Those hopes have never yet been implemented, and now this Government's hunger to privatise the nation's rich reserves of coal has presented us with yet another crucial fight which we must win.

Our task this week is to analyse the situation confronting us, and to decide our strategy for implementing Union policies, setting a course for the struggles that lie ahead. In doing so, we acknowledge our responsibility and commitment not only to our own members and their families, but to the wider Movement, in Britain and abroad.

This is not just a national perspective, but an international one, connecting the NUM with all people everywhere engaged in actively seeking a peaceful world governed by justice and equality.

Our task is to give detailed consideration to the events of the past four years, and, in particular, examine carefully the real consequences and effects of the overtime ban that began in November, 1983, and the strike of 1984/5.

I would like to remind Conference that in 1982, I publicly revealed a detailed hit-list of 95 pits earmarked for closure. The list was based on material leaked from the Coal Board, and prepared for the Monopolies and Mergers Commission on the instructions of the Tory Government.

That hit-list included 75 pits due to close within a three-year period. Today, 53 of the 75 earmarked for closure by March, 1986, have gone and unless this Union is prepared to take positive action, up to 42 more pits will close or merge, with 60,000 more jobs wiped out over the next few years. That is the prospect facing the NUM's Annual Conference in 1986.

The closures which have taken place represent a crucial loss, both to our industry and to the nation's energy needs — indeed, in the wake of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster, the closure decisions are doubly criminal.

But in order to move forward, it is essential that we dispel the pessimism and defeatism which has prevailed among some since the end of the strike. Let us look at the record in order to clear away any doubts as to what would have happened if the Union had *not* taken industrial action.

In 1983/84, prior to the strike, there were 19 pit closures: in contrast, closures over the two-year period 1984/86 average out to 14 per year — which is half the Board's intended target for closures and decimation.

In the fiscal year since March, 1985, the Board has secured closure of 27 pits, 5 coking plants and 10 workshops. Total manpower has been slashed by 43,000, which represents an annual average of 21,500 jobs lost over the two year period from March, 1984.

But look carefully at these figures, and we see that the same manpower reduction took place *in the year preceding the strike, alongside a higher rate of pit closures*. The fact is that the Board's programme of butchery was dramatically slowed down by our industrial action and is a clear demonstration that it can be stopped.

We cannot and must not ignore the terrible fact that manpower has fallen dramatically, with thousands of jobs axed by the Board. Nor can we ignore the fact that 27 pit closures since 1984 (the majority determined by local agreement) are 27 too many.

Nevertheless, the truth is that our determined stand during the overtime ban and year-long strike actually saved at least 30,000 jobs, and approximately 22 pits which the Board had planned to close by March, 1986. Make no mistake, the Board will still try to carry through its closure programme unless we stop them!

In analysing events over the past year, and the Board's continued attack on our industry, it must be recalled that many people put their faith in the Independent Review Body — set up to consider appeals on proposed closures — which arose from the settlement reached between the Coal Board and NACODS in October, 1984.

When the Deputies accepted the Board's deal, in the midst of our strike, I described it as a "sham".

Subsequent events — particularly the case of Bates Colliery in Northumberland — have proved that the NUM was absolutely right. The creation of the Independent Review Body was merely a device to buy off the Deputies, and keep them from giving support to our Union at a crucial phase of our dispute. Those who attacked our stand at that time are now conspicuous by their silence.

I believe that events of the past year, and the attacks not only on coal, but the continued butchery of steel, the railways, shipbuilding, construction, the car industry and of course the print industry, prove beyond any question that sooner or later British miners will have to take organised and united action to halt the continuing disintegration of the coal industry, and the further decimation of jobs.

For the sake of the entire nation, as well as our members and their families, *we must act sooner rather than later*.

Of course it is difficult to achieve outright victory in isolation from the rest of the Movement: our fight for coal is part of a wider struggle with far-reaching social, economic and political implications.

Had the general groundswell of support in 1984/85 been translated into mass industrial action, co-ordinated by the TUC — we would have secured a complete halt to the Coal Board's closure programme, and our colleagues in other industries would not now be under such savage attack.

At the very heart of our fight are the miners sacked and jailed because they defended Union policy. Eloquent phrases and great speeches cannot compensate for the victimisation and suffering endured by our comrades who are still in prison, nor the 500 who remain sacked, locked out by the Coal Board. It is our responsibility to take whatever action is necessary to win reinstatement and justice for all our members victimised in the struggle to save pits and jobs.

Conference this week must also recognise and confront the terrible harassment and intimidation inflicted on our members by local and area Coal Board management. Local agreements are being violated or ignored by the Board, and a brutal, destructive

discipline imposed on the workforce, with tactics reminiscent of those used by the old coal owners in the '20's and '30's.

The first task of the next Labour Government will be to reinstate without exception those victimised miners who have not yet got their jobs back — but equally important, there must be no hesitation on the part of that Labour Government in *sacking* NCB managers, whether at national, area or local level, where there is evidence that they have been party to the attempted butchery of this industry, to intimidation of its workforce, and to continued attacks on the NUM itself.

In regard to the Union, the Labour Government must ensure full restitution of all monies seized from us by sequestration and receivership, and implement a complete review of all cases of our members jailed for actions during the strike.

The National Coal Board, under Government orders, has not only abandoned any plans for the development of the industry, but has undertaken a policy designed to destroy industrial relations, conciliation, consultation — and, of course, the NUM itself.

The Board has unilaterally declared termination of the Coal Industry Conciliation Scheme and the dissolution of the independent arbitration body, the National Reference Tribunal, which have existed for 40 years. Only ten days ago, the High Court upheld the Board's action, which totally violates the intention and spirit of the 1946 Nationalisation Act.

The Board has furthermore announced its intention to scrap the Consultative Procedures, from pits to national level: this could, of course, mean the end of the Colliery Review Procedure and the Independent Review Body, described at its inception as "sacrosanct" by Government leaders.

The Coal Board is in fact doing everything in its power to help the breakaway "UDM", whose very existence they have used to try and weaken the bargaining power of Britain's miners.

What a sickening sight, a fortnight ago, were the pictures from the "UDM" Conference with a Tory Minister and MacGregor on the platform being applauded by delegates sitting alongside Tory MP's!

How much longer can two Notts Labour MP's continue to associate with this company outfit? How long before the Labour Party takes some action against these MP's and also Councillors who are openly associating with the Tory-supported "UDM", and are far more guilty of violating the Labour Party's Constitution, than those who have recently been expelled?

A key tactic in the Board's attack against the NUM has been to offer wage increases only to the breakaway "UDM". This is, of course, an open inducement to NUM members to leave their trade union and join the breakaway. The Coal Board's attempt to tie the offer of a wage increase to pension reductions, is a clear demonstration of their policy of discrimination. If the Board's proposals were accepted by the NUM, it would not only penalise the pension of *any* member involved in strike action in future, but would amount to a de facto no-strike agreement.

The NCB proposals have implications for all major industries with pension schemes and actually affect members of at least seven other unions in the coalmining industry. All these unions in common with the NUM, have rejected as wholly unacceptable the Coal Board's unlawful proposal. Only the "UDM", according to the Board, has been willing to accept this arrangement which would lead to a loss of pension benefits.

Any doubts about the connection between the Board and the "UDM" on this and the wages question were removed during the successful industrial tribunal action brought against the Board by the NUM in Leicestershire. Under Section 23 of the Employment Protection Act, our members were demanding from the Board the same rate of pay as that given to "UDM" members at Leicestershire's Ellistown Colliery.

In the course of that hearing, it was *proved* that the Chairman of the Coal Board had personally written a note guaranteeing that any member of the "UDM" at Ellistown would receive an increase in pay.

The astonishing thing was that at the time he wrote this note, far from there being any sort of breakaway majority, there was not one single "UDM" member at the pit!

The Tribunal found in favour of our members, and held that the Board's action was a clear inducement to recruit members for the "UDM", and an attempt to weaken the National Union of Mineworkers.

The Government, through the Coal Board, has forced us to fight not only for pits and jobs, but for our very existence. All our members have met that challenge magnificently, and over the past year have brought a fresh sense of unity to our struggle.

It is out of this growing unity and struggle that the NUM must fight for and win a substantial wage increase, a four day working week, early retirement on the same terms as apply to redundant mineworkers and the right to determine manpower, planning, development and investment policy in the coalmining industry.

All the eloquence, logic and justice in the world cannot, on their own, achieve these objectives, stop concerted attacks on our industry and the Union or win better wages and conditions. The only way we can win justice for our members and stop the onslaught against our industry is to take industrial action

Our fight against closures, privatisation and the breakaway are an integral part of our ongoing campaign for a planned, efficient and safe British energy policy. The 1979 nuclear disaster at Three Mile Island in the USA, and now the terrible catastrophe at Chernobyl in the Soviet Union prove how crucial it is for Britain to adopt an energy policy based on coal with simultaneous investment in alternative resources. Only a Government totally blind and deaf to reason can continue to ignore the multiple horrors of a nuclear power programme.

There must be a stop to nuclear power now! Britain needs a new co-ordinated energy policy based on coal, involving a minimum annual output of 200 million tonnes with a ban on all imports *particularly those from South Africa*. We need to simultaneously plan power stations, steel works, gas plants, industrial and domestic installations to receive and utilise our coal, meeting the needs of the British people, and playing a key role in rebuilding the nation's shattered industrial infrastructure.

Working to a new, up-dated "PLAN FOR COAL". Britain must at the same time develop the alternative energy sources such as wind, wave, barrage, geothermal and solar power, ensuring a completely co-ordinated and sensible energy policy for the next century.

I welcome the Labour Party's offer to work out a new "PLAN FOR COAL", but insist that this plan must provide for the phasing out of all nuclear power stations, alongside the immediate expansion of the British coal industry, and the opening of at least 50 new pits in the next decade.

Turning to the wider issues that affect us, I want to mention first the establishment of the International Miners' Organisation, probably the most significant step taken in the international Trade Union Movement since the end of the Second World War. The IMO has brought together mining and energy unions — irrespective of creed, religion, colour or politics — from all over the world.

It continues to grow and give support to workers engaged in struggle around the globe.

The IMO, and the NUM, will continue to give total support to our brothers and sisters fighting against apartheid in South Africa. We salute the long campaign and noble struggle of the African National Congress, and of the National Union of Mineworkers, South Africa, whose honorary President, Nelson Mandela, was invited to attend this Conference.

British trade unionists must make it clear that we are not prepared to passively watch the slaughter continue. If the British Government will not impose sanctions against South Africa, then the British Trade Union Movement must do so — in the same way that our Movement assisted the fledgling Soviet Union in 1917, and the Spanish Republic in 1936.

Our first step as trade unionists must be to insist that not one single British pension fund invests one penny of workers' money in South Africa. Let's stop listening to excuses about breaches of Trust Law, and accept our responsibilities as human beings. Failure to act on this issue puts us directly in breach of human rights conventions, and in violation of basic socialist principles.

I don't just want to see an end to apartheid — I want to see the Facist Government of South Africa brought down, not only ending apartheid but at the same time ensuring that Black men and women are able to control their own destiny in their own country.

We are living in a world not only torn apart by the horrors of South Africa, the Middle East and Central America, but threatened by the looming possibility of a nuclear holocaust.

The criminal action of the United States in bombing Libya in April and the deplorable decision of the Thatcher Government to allow British bases to be used for that action, show how close we are at any given time to a nuclear war. That action demonstrated above all why the next Labour Government must get rid of all US bases and immediately introduce unilateral nuclear disarmament.

The appalling waste of money expended on weapons of destruction in the arms race should be used instead to improve the quality of human life. Britain is ravaged by high unemployment, deprivation and discrimination. This Government has not only slashed our health, education and social services, but ruthlessly destroyed the democratic machinery of the GLC and Metropolitan Councils, and established a police force armed to the teeth in riot gear with CS gas and rubber bullets which has become an openly para-military force.

Our class is in danger of losing all democratic advances made over the past 50 years and trade unionists must be in the forefront of the battle to protect and restore basic civil and human rights. That battle is inextricably linked to the campaign to win the return of a Labour Government committed to carrying through a socialist programme, at the next General Election.

For our own Union the task ahead may seem formidable. The legendary A. J. Cook said at the end of the 1926 strike that the miners had faced "the legions of hell", and his words describe perfectly the forces which have faced this Union since 1982.

To combat these forces British miners need a united National Union of Mineworkers campaigning to defend pits, jobs, wages and conditions. We need unity in this industry — but we must never again commit the error of our forefathers, who accepted a false unity and reconciliation with Spencerism in 1937. There is a place for every miner inside the NUM but there can be no place or any reconciliation with a 1986 version of Spencerism in the form of a Tory-backed "UDM".

We need unity to win the aims outlined in this Address — but we also need to win the hearts and minds of our members, to engage in the necessary action to make our objectives a reality. We should not be reticent or afraid of our policies — we should trust our membership. Many years ago a famous working class leader, Harry Pollitt, said:

"We have become so hard and practical that we are ashamed of painting the vision splendid — of showing glimpses of the promised land. It is missing from our speeches, our press and our pamphlets, and if one dares to talk about the "gleam" one is in danger of being accused of sentimentality. Yet I am convinced it was this kind of verbal inspiration that gave birth to the indestructable urge which helped the pioneers of the Movement to keep fighting for freedom, when it was by no means as easy as it is today".

Let us paint the vision splendid and translate the aims in this Address into a practical reality. *(Applause)*