

## PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

Mr. S. THOMPSON (Vice-President, National Union of Mineworkers): Delegates, guests, Conference, it gives me great pleasure this morning to request the National President Arthur Scargill, to give his Presidential Address. (*Applause*)

Mr. A. SCARGILL (President): Mr. Vice-President, Comrades and friends, before I begin my Presidential Address I should like to make two comments which I think are of importance, particularly to all members of the National Union. On behalf of all the delegates and representatives from the British Coalfield, I would like to say how warmly we welcome Sammy Thompson, who has been ill for a number of months, back on to the platform as our Vice-President. (*Applause*) I would also like to extend a very warm welcome to our former Vice-President, who has just undergone an eye operation, but who is here with us, Mick McGahey. (*Applause*)

Comrades, since the Tories came to power in 1979, they have adhered to a systematic course of destruction, decimating public industries and services, stripping national assets and removing power, step by step, from institutions of potential or actual resistance, such as local authorities or trade unions.

The twin aim of the Tory strategy was the creation of mass unemployment (now standing in real terms in excess of four million) and the introduction of employment legislation designed to render trade unionism virtually ineffective.

The Prime Minister has never made any secret of her determination to wipe socialism from the agenda of British politics. A central plank of this Government's ideological approach has been its attack on our public service and nationalised industries. We have seen the privatisation of British Telecom, British Gas and British Airways. We now face the prospective sell-off of electricity, steel, rail — and coal.

Tory Government policies have systematically closed down the nation's manufacturing industries; only the remaining revenue from the North Sea oil is holding off the worst economic crisis in the history of modern British capitalism.

Dependence on imports has grown as our industries have collapsed, rendering Britain's social/economic landscape desolate. Hopeless and despair are now rife in both city and countryside, especially among young people, who see little chance of a future worth striving for.

The N.U.M.'s decision in 1983/84 to resist closures and redundancies was the spark that inspired many workers, including teachers, printworkers, nurses and seafarers to take similar action in defence of *their* jobs, *their* industries and *their* communities. The decision to fight against pit closures was absolutely justified and failure to take such action would have resulted in our industry being in a much weaker position than it is at the present time.

If our Union had not fought, more pits would have closed, and more jobs would have been destroyed during the past four years. The example of British Steel is clear evidence of this fact.

Since the end of the miner's strike, the Tory Government has intensified its plan to wipe out pits, jobs and the N.U.M. itself. Whilst the Union has survived, it is essential that we should not attempt to gloss over or minimise the destruction and damage done to our members and their communities by the Tories' ruthless programme of butchery.

The pit closure programme never did make economic sense — and it has been demonstrated time and time again that it is far more costly to close our pits than to keep them open, producing coal, providing jobs and stimulating the economy.

I am convinced that British Coal has only been able to pursue its pit closure programme since the end of the strike because the N.U.M. has not taken the united industrial action essential to stop the Coal Board and Government from their savage decimation of this vital basic industry.

I feel certain that if the N.U.M. had not called off the overtime ban in the spring of 1985, the continuing resistance of our members could have prevented the massive closure programme that has since taken place.

When the overtime ban was called off, the Coal Board saw that as a green light move in against our members and against the N.U.M. British Coal's aim was — and is — to destroy the effectiveness of the Union: its tactics deployed at national, area and local level since March 1985 have shown this very clearly.

There are those within the trade union and Labour movement — the supporters of "New Realism" — who believe that the issue we must deal with is one of economics — nothing could be further from reality.

*We are not dealing with an economic argument; we are dealing with a deliberate political attack by the Tory Government upon a nationalised industry and upon the N.U.M., which the Tories see as a major class enemy because we have resisted attacks upon jobs, living standards and communities.*

Anyone in our movement who does not understand this basic fact is failing to grasp one of the fundamental challenges facing us today. A simple examination demonstrates this point very clearly indeed.

At a time when we are still seeing senseless pit closures and job losses, the Government is allowing, and openly encouraging, 15 million tonnes of coal imports into Britain each year. Over 90 million tonnes per year are flooding into Europe. These imports come from all parts of the world — but primarily from apartheid South Africa where coal is produced by virtual slave labour; from Colombia where employers use children as young as seven to work the mines; and from Poland, which — it is commonly accepted — is dumping its coal on the world market to secure "hard currency".

None of this is challenged by the Tories, who argued on the one hand for a "market philosophy" for coal, insisting that our industry must compete in the world — but on the other hand provide huge subsidies and unlimited financial support for the agricultural industry and for the deadly dangerous, uneconomic nuclear industry.

If anything shows that the issue is not about economics it is the fact that the Tories are prepared to heavily subsidise the uneconomic nuclear industry and pump more and more cash into it whilst at the same time close down pits which have only just been opened or had a massive investment programme recently completed.

The only real answer to the problem facing Britain's coal industry is the introduction of a sensible, planned energy policy based upon coal — a plan which would see the development and expansion of the coal industry and an end to pit closures — a policy which would stop the senseless importation of coal, and bring about the phase-out of the dangerous, costly nuclear power industry.

All these issues are connected to the threat of privatisation. Our Union must mount a massive campaign against the privatisation of electricity and we must make it clear that *we will not accept the privatisation of our coal industry. We will not stand by while our forefathers' long struggle for nationalisation is destroyed.*

The protection of our nationalised industry is inextricably linked with the welfare of this nation as a whole. To meet the energy needs of the 21st century, we should be planning and developing now at least 40 new mines designed to come on stream by the turn of the century.

The introduction of a ban on coal imports, starting of course with those from South Africa, together with a curb on the nuclear power programme could create a potential demand for an additional 35 million tonnes of coal per year.

If a ban on coal imports was implemented within Europe, the potential market for our coal could be enough to make the concept of 200 million tonnes per annum a reality within 10 or 15 years.

We need — and Britain needs — an expansion in our industry, with the development of petrochemicals, liquefaction, fluidised bed combustion, gasification and combined heat and power schemes — the technologies of the future, all of which would fuel an energy programme based on coal.

The Tories and British Coal gave further proof of their political intentions when they scrapped our industry's 40-year-old conciliation arrangements in order to assist the breakaway U.D.M. They firmly believed that the elimination of the conciliation scheme would favour the U.D.M, undermine the N.U.M. and assist British Coal in its aim of introducing a six-day working week, nine-hour working day and continental shift working.

The Corporation has consistently tried to pressurize the N.U.M. and its Areas into accepting what is known as a majority/minority conciliation scheme which would deny recognition to thousands of N.U.M. members, particularly in Nottinghamshire and South Derbyshire. I warn this Conference that our Union must not — under any circumstances — accept the dangerous majority/minority scheme advocated by British Coal.

There are also those in the N.U.M. who now argue for a "joint" conciliation scheme with the breakaway U.D.M. and I warn Conference that this concept is every bit as dangerous as the majority/minority policy. Acceptance of a "joint" scheme would never stop British Coal from negotiating separately with the U.D.M. — *let me remind Conference that the Coal Board did exactly that in 1985 before they destroyed the existing scheme!*

If we had such a joint scheme, we would also lose the protection we now have for claiming equal wages under Section 23 of the Employment Protection Act.

There are Area leaders in our Union who believe we must have a conciliation scheme at any costs. They believe that we can return to the situation which existed prior to the 1984/85 miners' strike. They seem *oblivious* to the fact that the Board member for Industrial Relations, Kevan Hunt, made the Corporation's view very clear in an interview with the FINANCIAL TIMES at the end of last year when, commenting on the view of such Area leaders, he said that they "... have a naive belief that if they offer concessions we will be able to do the same. We cannot".

To accept the majority/minority concept or a "joint" conciliation scheme with the U.D.M. would represent a betrayal of those men and women who have supported this Union solidly both during and since the end of the miner's strike. Our Union must not only oppose these iniquitous arrangements but demand a conciliation scheme which gives the N.U.M. the right to represent all our members at every level for the purpose of free collective bargaining.

British Coal has complained it lost over £100 million last year due to industrial disputes. The Corporation maintains that a good industrial relations climate would help to resolve this problem. If they are really serious about creating a climate of good industrial relations, then they will accept the Union's proposed conciliation scheme which gives representation and recognition to all our members irrespective of where they work.

We must also reaffirm the Conference decision that this Union will not sit down with or recognise the breakaway U.D.M. In view of comments made in a number of our Areas over the past 18 months, it is imperative that this Conference reiterates our firm commitment to winning all mineworkers back into the N.U.M. — but also make clear that there can be no accommodation or appeasement with the U.D.M. itself, and no place in our Union for the likes of Lynk, Prendergast and Greatrex, who have sought to destroy the National Union of Mineworkers.

British Coal is pursuing what Sir Robert Haslam describes as a "new culture": a high-volume, low-cost industry, in which the Corporation sees the introduction of a six-day working week, the use of outside contractors and privatisation as essential features. It doesn't require a genius to work out that the introduction of a six-day week against the background of a static market would result in the closure of at least 30 pits. This was admitted by the editor of the FINANCIAL TIMES INTERNATIONAL COAL

REPORT when he gave expert evidence to the European Coal Commission in December 1987.

We already have a situation where privatisation-by-stealth is operating in our industry, with the growing use of outside contractors, the reintroduction of the immoral, exploitative "butty" system, and increasing multi-national investment in private mines.

Miners have seen their basic wages systematically eroded, and replaced by incentive payments as British Coal seeks to implement its "new culture", reintroducing practices the Union got rid of when our industry was nationalised 40 years ago. *Against this sustained attack, with the looming threat of privatisation of electricity and coal, it is clear that we are in a situation where compromise is no longer an option!*

Our Conference last year, at the end of an excellent debate, agreed a policy of opposition to British Coal's plan for flexible working and the introduction of a six-day week. However, in spite of that decision, various Area leaders time and again have supported discussing with British Coal the introduction of "flexible working". We should remember that the "Miron Plan" in 1973 contained the concept of 18 coaling shifts per week as a first step towards 24 hours per day, seven days per week continental shift working. In an industry like ours, the introduction of "flexible working" would not only result in job losses but adversely affect the health of those who work in the industry and the environment of our communities.

*At the I.L.O. Coal Mines Committees Session held recently in Geneva, representatives from mining unions in 18 nations unanimously condemned flexible working and urged all mining unions to resist its implementation. Delegates from the United States explained in graphic detail just how bad conditions have become in those areas where flexible working arrangements have been introduced.*

It is imperative that Conference reaffirms our position, and makes clear to British Coal that we will not accept, under any circumstances, the destruction of the Five Day Week Agreement which our forefathers fought so hard to attain.

Any doubts about the policy of the Corporation should have evaporated with the announcement by Sir Robert Haslam, who told the U.D.M. conference that he was going to destroy mineworkers' traditional Annual Holiday period — a policy, once again, which will lead to job losses in the industry as well as affecting adversely family life.

With the rapid introduction of new technology and the inevitable increased productivity levels it is time that our Union began demanding benefits which should rightfully be ours. We have one of the lowest unsocial-hours payments in British industry, while miners' wages contain a higher proportion of incentive bonus payments than in any other industrial sector.

Our Union must adopt an approach based on traditional class response when facing a Government and employer intent on destroying both living standards and the Union itself. Our demands should include:

- a four day working week within the existing Five Day Week Agreement;
- implementation of a permanent ban on all systematic overtime, thus enabling the employment of thousands of young people, sons and daughters of mineworkers who currently have no jobs at all;
- optional retirement at 50 on full wages;
- scrapping the incentive bonus scheme and replacing it with a guaranteed salary of at least £20,000 for coalface workers;
- unsocial hours payments to be raised to at least one-third of the standard grade rate which gives an immediate £25 per week increase.

There have been fundamental changes within the industry over the past 10 years and it is essential that the N.U.M. recognises the need to re-organise its own internal structures, if we are to have an effective fight-back. The National Secretary, Peter Heathfield, has reminded Conference on a number of occasions that the federal structure which served the Union adequately in the past is rapidly becoming its biggest liability.

British Coal are highly centralised in all departments, and if we are to be efficient in implementing policy and defending our members' interests then we must end the federal structure and build one National Union. To end sectarianism was always the dream of progressive elements in the N.U.M. and today no one can have any doubt that they were absolutely correct.

Next year, 1989, is the Centenary of the M.F.G.B./N.U.M. — what better time to establish one truly National Union, and fulfil the dreams of our forefathers? We can make a start by ensuring that all the proposals agreed for reorganisation in the N.U.M. are fulfilled before the end of 1989.

However, it is even more important that we try to bring into existence an energy union comprising of workers in all the energy industries. I first put forward the idea of such a union in the early '70s, when I was Area President in Yorkshire. Predictably, it was vociferously attacked, both inside and outside the trade union movement — and so was I, for advocating policies which were forward-looking and possibly ahead of their time!

We must begin discussions with other sympathetic trade unions about the establishment of an energy union. Workers in all parts of the energy sector have a common purpose in defending their jobs and industries against coordinated Government action, whilst at the same time fighting to improve wages and conditions.

*We need a commitment from this Conference that not only records our desire to become part of a wider energy organisation but translates that desire into reality within months rather than years.*

Our Union has played an increasing international role over the past five years, particularly in the International Miners' Organisation. This year, the I.M.O. — now representing 43 nations and six million workers — was able to win for the first time major resolutions on sanctions against South Africa and on nuclear disarmament at the I.L.O. Coal Mines Committee Session in Geneva.

Our record in opposing South Africa's apartheid regime is second to none, and this Conference will, I know, reaffirm condemnation of that obscene and vile system, redoubling our efforts to free all political prisoners and bring nearer the day when apartheid is abolished forever.

Let us hope that it will not be too long before that living inspiration to all humanity, Nelson Mandela — who is an Honorary Member of our Union — can be with us at our Conference, bringing a message of hope and vision. Along with his wife, Winnie, and millions of Black South Africans who battle every day against oppression worse than anything we will ever experience. Mandela has taught us that you do not collaborate with a system that seeks to oppress you. Not for him the easy option — or the compromise which could have brought his release; his has always been a principled stand, and on behalf of Conference I extend warm, fraternal birthday greetings to a great leader and a very brave man.

Conference should also record our support for the mineworkers of Colombia, who are struggling against terrible odds as they seek to establish the right to organise freely and without intimidation from the State. As in South Africa, workers in Colombia are shot at — and murdered — almost daily, and it is our responsibility to do all we can to put an end to the killing and brutalisation they suffer.

I would like to take this opportunity in my annual address to record my deep appreciation to our membership for showing confidence in me and re-electing me as National President in January of this year.

Five years ago, at the Perth Conference I made clear my commitment not only to the democratic principle of periodic elections but to the need for a campaigning Union. When a young Derbyshire miner called on National leaders to go into the coalfields and see what things were really like, I responded immediately to that challenge.

Let me repeat today that I am not only ready but eager to make my contribution in the coalfields, to go out campaigning amongst our members at the pits, coking plants, workshops and in the communities. I want to see all of us campaigning especially, to involve our young members in every aspect of Union activity. We must utilise and develop the skills of our young members because in them we have the future, and they must have proper investment from us. I know we all welcome the fact that at long last a National Youth Committee has been created within our Union, and this must become a real forum for building the national unity we so desperately need.

There is another force which we also have an obligation to fully support. I refer to the Women's Support Groups which kept our communities alive during the 1984/85 strike, and which have continued to support the fight against pit closures, and to campaign on behalf of victimised miners since the end of the dispute.

Of our colleagues sacked and jailed for defending Union policy, some 220 remain locked out. I would like to see Conference adopting a strategy which not only intensifies the fight for their reinstatement but which looks at ways and means of involving them fully in Union activity — to ensure that they are protected from the demoralisation and despair which are the worst features of victimisation.

There are still three young men imprisoned, and we must not forget them, either. Two of them, Russell Shankland and Dean Hancock, still have a long time to serve in jail. I am proud to have an opportunity to pay tribute to the spirit and courage of these two young men.

During my re-election campaign, I made my position clear on all the major issues facing our Union and our movement. I warned that the Tories would do anything, including the introduction of new legislation, to try to remove me from office. The fact that they have now adopted legislation which so clearly and blatantly seeks to remove me from the Presidency of our Union (whilst leaving others like Hammond of the E.E.P.T.U. untouched) is yet another example of the way in which the ruling class operates.

*Compliance and collaboration with the new Employment Act will only drag us deeper into the quicksand created by Tory policies. We must have a campaign of outright opposition and defiance to these anti-trade union laws.*

This Presidential Address cannot ignore the policy reviews currently being undertaken within the Labour Party. I want to make it clear I utterly deplore what I perceive as an abandonment of socialist principles in the policy review statements. Our union has long fought for unilateral nuclear disarmament, and both the N.U.M. and the Labour Party should *condemn anyone in the leadership of the Labour Party who seeks to destroy that unilateral policy — whether on television or anywhere else in the vain hope that to do so will bring electoral success.*

This is a policy which has been won by the courage and determination — and principles — of groups such as the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, and by the magnificent women of Greenham Common. Abandonment of our commitment to unilateral nuclear disarmament would not only cost us the next General Election, but could destroy the Labour Party to which we are affiliated and belong.

Other aspects of the current policy review are seriously disturbing. It seeks to retain certain elements of the Tories' anti-union legislation, and such a move should be condemned by the entire trade union and Labour movement.

There must instead, be a clear commitment to completely repeal these laws; we should be campaigning now for positive legislation aimed at 100 per cent trade unionism!

When Hugh Gaitskell failed in the 1960s to remove Clause Four from the Party Constitution, the vast majority of members believed that never again would such an attempt be made. Today, many find the arguments for "share ownership", acceptance of the "mixed economy" and a "market approach" reprehensible. Those in the leadership of our Party who seek these policy changes are just as guilty as Gaitskell was in trying to wipe out Clause Four and introduce an openly social-democrat type of party which would accept rather than change the capitalist society.

I regard these aspects of the current policy review as classic examples of the influence of "New Realism", an influence confirmed by the Labour Party Leader when he said on 11th June that the only way to defeat Mrs Thatcher's 'Government of Greed' was to embrace New Realism.

But if our movement were to follow that advice it would be embracing a malignancy which will both bring electoral defeat and split the movement from top to bottom at a time when it should be uniting. It is time the Labour leadership stopped moulding policy to suit the flavour of the day and the result of the latest opinion poll. It is time for a return to the socialist principles upon which our movement was founded.

The battle cry of Keir Hardie in calling for the common ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange is as relevant today as it was when it was first made. It is time for our movement to stop looking inward, and to start fighting the common enemy.

There has been reference from several quarters in recent months to a statement which warns us against becoming a monument rather than a movement. The original and accurate source of that statement was actually the famous Communist M.P. Willie Gallacher who coined it when speaking of *the need for class struggle and*

*direct action against an unjust, unfair capitalist system.* Gallacher would be appalled at the mis-use of his phrasing, and his politics.

Those who support "New Realism" argue that there is nothing we can do until the next General Election; we have to live with things as they are, and not as we would like them to be. Such an attitude clashes with every basic principle of Socialist thought and with the history of human progress.

Imagine that in the Second World War the French Resistance had decided that they should do nothing until such time as the occupying powers felt it was time for war to come to an end! Can you imagine what would have happened had the Vietnamese given up on their incredible 30-year struggle against French and United States imperialism?

When you face a class of enemy intent on destroying you, you have a simple choice — either accept and submit — to the destruction of our jobs and industries, our health, education and welfare service, housing, public transport — or stand up and fight back.

I want to see our Union regenerate the campaigning spirit of 1982/84/85. I want to see us build a fight-back greater and stronger than that tremendous struggle which itself inspired workers around the world. *(Applause)*