

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS:

MR. P. E. HEATHFIELD (Secretary): Colleagues, fellow delegates, could I now call upon the President to present his Presidential Address to Conference. (*Applause*)

THE PRESIDENT (MR. A. SCARGILL) National Secretary, comrades and friends, We gather for our Centenary Conference at a time when attacks against our members and our industry are becoming increasingly vicious.

Pit closures and job losses continue to devastate not just mining communities but local economies throughout the British coalfield. Mineworkers' wages, conditions, health and safety standards are being steadily eroded in the Areas. The Tory Government now openly states that it intends to take the industry back into private ownership. In fact, the Government and British Coal are already embarked on a programme of privatisation by stealth.

Their plan is to snatch away every advance, every protection and achievement won not just since 1947 but over a century of miners' struggle. At the same time they are hiving off sections such as transport departments, workshops and ancillary undertakings as well as employing thousands of outside contractors to do the work normally carried out by British Coal employees.

As we commemorate 100 years of national trade unionism through the MFGB and the NUM, we must face up to the lessons our own history holds for us, and re-dedicate ourselves to protecting our members, their families, communities, the Union and the coal industry.

Ours is definitely not an "isolationist" approach. Our fight for pits and jobs has been built on concern for the nation, as a whole. We cannot separate industrial matters from the fate of the environment, the economy or society.

Our forebears who founded the Miners' Federation of Great Britain in 1889 struggled — as we struggle today — against a political system, capitalism, which depended on the submission of the working class in its greedy pursuit of private not social profit.

Our Union was born out of the pain, suffering and tragedy which were the hallmarks of the British mining industry. Those who built the MFGB and later the NUM recognised that to fight against exploitation and organised capitalism they themselves must have a nationally organised trade union.

Their aims were practical and immediate: however, they had something else. They had a vision — of a nationalised mining industry owned by and for the people with a strong National Union of Mineworkers whose members were united in protecting the interests of miners and their communities.

During the course of our first century, the MFGB and the NUM have been able to win major advances in wages, living standards, job security, safety and health. The eight-hour day, vital health and safety legislation, improved wages and working conditions, the Five Day Week Agreement and, of course, nationalisation, were all achieved after long and bitter struggle — while the Plan for Coal of the mid-70's which set out an expanding industry with job security was created in the aftermath of the 1974 General Elections.

Today, however, all our achievements throughout a century of struggle as a national union are under attack from a Tory Government with a general class hatred of trade unionism and a specific class hatred of the NUM.

It seems incredible that against a background of unemployment now above three million the Government and British Coal are not only destroying miners' jobs but are seeking to increase the length of the working week in our industry. Yet that is exactly what they are trying to impose.

Now, of course, British Coal's constant use of the Margam "carrot" has been exposed as a fraud. A few weeks ago, the Corporation and the breakaway UDM claimed, for the second year running, agreement over working Margam on a six-day week — but British Coal had to admit that there is still no indication of when or even if that project might begin.

With thousands of miners' jobs lost including many in the South Wales Area during the past four years, British Coal's offer of 800 jobs in exchange for surrender of the five-day week seems particularly obscene.

The Five Day Week Agreement was born out of the blood, sweat, toil and tears of our forebears. How can we give it away? It is not ours to give. It is a trust that we must not violate.

Indeed, in this the year of our Centenary, we should be fighting for a four not six-day working week and we should be opposing all proposals for flexible working including the ten-hour day, the six-day week or continental shift systems.

One of the cornerstones of nationalisation in 1947 was a conciliation agreement which worked perfectly well until 1986, when it was scrapped unilaterally by the Coal Board. In its place the Corporation has proposed a scheme which would rob many of our members, particularly in Notts and South Derbyshire of Union representation — Their proposed new conciliation machinery demands our participation alongside the breakaway UDM whose leaders did all they could to destroy our Union during and since the year-long strike of 1984-5.

The NUM through Conference and N.E.C. decisions has affirmed and reaffirmed 21 times that it is not prepared to accept a conciliation scheme which denies recognition to sections of our membership, nor is it prepared to sit down with the UDM, which is openly backed by the Tories and British Coal.

Like the Spencer organisation in the 1920's and '30's, the UDM was established in the knowledge that it would be used to attack trade union opposition to vicious Government policies. This is an organisation whose leaders urged people to cross picket lines in the 84/85 strike, and who opposed the Labour Party in the last General Election two years ago.

History shows us that we must not make the same mistake as the MFGB which eventually allowed the Spencer organisation back into the fold. That was a mistake which was to adversely affect the body politic of the NUM for nearly 50 years. The only way to deal with this sort of organisation is to destroy it, not placate it.

History also shows us that the attacks we face today have not come out of the blue. The past few years have revealed painfully what happens when we do not fight back, mobilising active support from the entire trade union and Labour movement as we go along.

In 1982 and again in 1983, I gave repeated warnings that the Coal Board had a secret hit list which, if carried through, would close at least 70 pits, wipe out at least 100,000 jobs and decimate mining communities Today, I have been proven tragically correct in my warnings.

Now I have another warning: British Coal's intention is to reduce this industry to no more than 50 pits with 50,000 men producing an annual output of 50 million tonnes as the Corporation prepares the ground for privatisation.

There is nothing fanciful in this prediction. The Permanent Under-Secretary of the Energy Department has admitted that the Government is in effect underwriting the costs of laying off at least 20,000 miners in what they term the "restructuring of the industry".

The irony is that the Government's programme of butchery, paraded at one time as a means of cutting losses, is now exposed as a loss-maker itself, British Coal Chairman Sir Robert Haslam acknowledged just over a fortnight ago that what has prevented the Corporation from breaking even this year has been its own policy of accelerated pit closures!

How do we deal with this lunacy? There is only one course of action, and the last four years have proved that there is no alternative to it — it is to fight back. The dockers, the railwaymen, bus workers, tube workers and other sections have all been involved or are involved in industrial action at the present time. The NUM should be in the vanguard of this massive resistance to Thatcher's policies.

The Union must begin a campaign to re-establish miners at the top of the industrial wages league. With inflation well over 8% and a 90% increase in productivity, it is essential that we do all in our power to win decent wages and conditions for our members.

In order to regain our place in the wages league, we should demand a minimum wage of £10,000 per year on a salary basis. We should resist any change in holiday arrangements and demand an unsocial hours payment equal to that paid in other industries.

It has always been one of the central tasks of a trade union to defend and improve the wages and conditions of its members but in order to fulfil this objective we have to ensure that the resolutions passed at our Conference are translated into positive action.

During the last four years, we have seen the rise, and now I hope the fall, within our ranks of "new realism" - the politics of fear, and a poison which seeks to kill off every hope and aspiration on which our forebears built our Union.

"New realism" is an evil philosophy which has been unable to save one pit, one community, or even one miner's job. Its energy, instead, has been channelled into an ongoing campaign against NUM policy and the Union's National Officials whose only crime (to which I plead guilty) has been to remain loyal to the decisions of Conference and the principles on which we were elected.

"New realists" scorn principles, but principles are what trade unionism is all about. Without commitment to a belief, a vision, we cannot reach out to fulfil our aims and goals.

I want to urge all those who have spent their best energies over the past few years attacking Scargill and Heathfield — and our sadly missed colleague Sam Thompson — instead of mobilising the fight for pits and jobs. Please comrades, stop the internecine warfare. Let us instead unite for the future of our industry and Union. It's time to get off our knees, stand on our feet and fight.

Let us start working seriously for a truly National Union, shaking off the out-moded federal structure which now clearly holds us back from building the unity so essential for the problems we face ahead.

Our fight for the coal industry cannot be isolated from the struggles being waged by the wider trade union and Labour movement. Over the past year at the instruction of Conference, we have sought discussions with other trade unions, looking at ways in which we could merge or amalgamate to best protect our own interests and function on a closer basis with other workers.

We are dealing with a highly centralised and organised energy sector where the employers understand the need for a unified approach. This they have demonstrated both in their dealing with the coal industry, the gas industry, the oil industry, the electricity supply industry and even the nuclear power industry.

It is obvious that those unions which organise within the energy sector must come together to form a single energy union or energy sector. In line with Annual Conference instruction, we have met the Transport and General Workers Union to discuss ways and means of the two organisations joining together.

At our first meeting in June it was agreed we should jointly consider the organisation and financial implications of a merger. A merger would clearly involve a transfer of engagements and the benefits are there for all to see.

I am satisfied on the basis of our first meeting that provided there is a willingness on the part of all NUM Areas to join together in a single energy sector, then the aim of our Conference for a merger can be realised before the end of 1989.

It does not require me to spell out the considerable advantages of having an amalgamation with a union which already organises in all other areas of electricity supply and is also engaged in other forms of mining including tin, bauxite and open-cast coalmining.

It can provide an exciting challenge and new development for the National Union of Mineworkers as we enter our second century. I hope that by the end of the year we can complete negotiations, reach agreement and establish an energy union/sector that has been the dream of a large number of people in this Conference for many, many years.

Mobilisation of action within the trade union movement is crucial in the campaign to win the next General Election for a Labour Government committed to the Socialist policies needed to halt the terrible destruction going on around us.

The Tories have already achieved privatisation in British Telecom, British Airways and British Gas. Now in addition to steel they want to sell off electricity, the railways and coal. Only a campaign of massive active resistance can stop them.

We know that our nationalised industry has never been managed in true Socialist fashion: the ruling class civil service in Whitehall has always prevented that. But since the Tories came to Parliamentary power ten years ago, the attacks on us have been ferocious and relentless. The Tories have ensured that Britain's nationalised coal has been forced to compete with heavily subsidised foreign coal as well as oil, while our industry has borne interest burdens which today even British Coal deplors.

In pursuit of their madhouse "economics" the Tories can ignore the enormous adverse cost of £400 million per annum on our balance of payments caused by the importation of foreign coal. They ignore world public opinion and import coal from South Africa and Colombia. Meanwhile, they press ahead with all the horrors of the nuclear programme.

Our Union was among the very first to warn that nuclear power was unnecessary, uncontrollably dangerous, and hideously uneconomical! For years we urged the National Coal Board to join with us in lobbying the Government on behalf of our own industry which could produce energy so much more cheaply and safely than by the nuclear option. For years the Board dismissed our arguments as untenable.

Today, however, British Coal accepts the truth of our claims. Only the other day I read in the press about the Corporation's marketing director telling an international meeting of coal producers that the atomic industry "should have died forever" after the Chernobyl disaster. He further accused the British Government of brainwashing the public about nuclear power! It is a pity that he did not take this view when he was busy trying to brainwash the National Union that nuclear power was considerably cheaper than coal.

It is true that this Government's commitment to the nuclear menace is nothing short of insane. It is prepared to ignore the terrifying examples of Three Mile Island and Chernobyl, together with the widespread contamination around the world over the past 35 years: and it is prepared on top of that to ignore the admitted fact that nuclear power is 40 percent more expensive than the coal which our members produce. The Tories argue on the one hand for what they describe as cheap imports and yet on the other hand press ahead with obscene, expensive nuclear power.

The Tories having lost the economic and safety arguments in respect of nuclear power, have now suddenly become converted to the environmental lobby. Their conversion to "green politics" is as big a sham as their economic policy has been over the past ten years.

The Tories and their supporters in the nuclear lobby — who have spent millions over the years in spelling out untruths, distortions and downright lies — now believe they have found a stick with which to beat the coal industry, and to some extent the oil industry, on the question of the "greenhouse effect".

To accept the option of nuclear power as an answer to global warming would be to swap the prospect of a tragedy with the certainty of a catastrophe.

For the problem to be resolved (and I say it can be resolved satisfactorily) it must first be understood by the general public — in whose hands part of the solution lies.

It is no longer possible for the Government to ignore the crying need for a rational and sensible planned energy policy which takes into account all the environmental factors, including the contamination that we know is caused by nuclear energy and to which there is no solution.

Acid rain is a problem caused by the burning of all fossil fuels in relatively uncontrolled combustion environments. The technology to eliminate acid rain from coal combustion is now well developed, and even the Tories have to concede acid rain can be eliminated.

Coal's global contribution to the "greenhouse effect" from coal-fired power stations is between 7 and 10% with Britain contributing less than 1%.

The "greenhouse effect" can be dealt with by a number of measures — for example carbon dioxide emissions can be drastically reduced by increasing energy efficiency and energy conservation. Advanced coal technology such as pressurised fluidised bed combustion (PFBC) can reduce carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions by 20% by increasing efficiency by 20% and thus producing electricity more cheaply than a nuclear station.

Combined heat and power can raise energy efficiency even further and based on advanced coal systems could make a real economic social and environmental improvement.

It would make much more environmental sense to develop a public transport policy — based on a railway system using electrification — than developing our already congested roads and motorways, pumping out even more pollution.

It is hypocritical in the extreme for the Government to advocate more nuclear power stations on environmental grounds, when they know that nuclear power is highly dangerous and extremely damaging to the environment.

If the same research funding which has been made available to the nuclear industry had been made available to the coal industry and coal-fired power stations, then all the problems associated with the "greenhouse effect" and acid rain would now be resolved.

We need international action to ban CFC's, stop deforestation and develop a policy of reforestation as well as implement policies to increase energy efficiency and conservation.

These are the policies which can lead to a better and cleaner environment and only an energy policy based upon clean coal and alternative energy resources, can take Britain safely and economically into the 21st century.

Capitalism is a system which by definition exploits and oppresses. It is the historical task of our movement as a whole to expose and attack its evils. It is, in fact, the Tory Government and capitalist system which is now attacking our health service, education system, social services and trade union rights. It is this system which is attacking the very basis of democracy, civil liberties and human rights, and the trade union and Labour movement need a positive response to attacks which take away the very basis of our existence.

For that, we need a Labour Party leadership prepared to campaign for and implement Socialist policies designed not just to win a General Election but to transform society. We need a Labour Government as committed to its class as the Tories have been to theirs.

The National Union of Mineworkers has always been directly involved both in industrial and political policy-making. The Union has always recognised that it is not sufficient to have an industrial concept. It is essential to have a political dimension as well. It is, therefore, imperative that we make our position clear to the Labour Party — our party — as we prepare the ground towards the next General Election.

The major issues facing all of us today have to be tackled by the Labour Party when it becomes the Government of the day. I have no hesitation in demanding that the next Labour Government should immediately implement the following policies:

- a) Re-nationalise all industries and services privatised over the past 10 years:
- b) Nationalise all other industries and services including banks, insurance companies and the news media:
- c) Firmly reject any proposals for share ownership:
- d) Commit Britain to withdrawing from the European Common Market, getting out of this capitalist club and back into the world:
- e) Repeal all anti-trade union legislation introduced by the Tories since 1979:
- f) Phase out all civil nuclear power and introduce an energy policy based on nationalised coal and alternative energy resources:
- g) Demand the re-opening of all pits which should never have been closed:
- h) Demand the reinstatement of all miners sacked by the Coal Board for participating in the 84/85 strike, with full pay for the lost years:
- i) Re-affirm our commitment to unilateral nuclear disarmament, and spend the money saved on health, education, housing and social services:
- j) Re-affirm our commitment to a Socialist system based on common ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange.

Throughout the past decade key sections of the British trade union movement have come under attack politically as well as industrially. The process of law has been used time and time again to stop us from exercising our rights, and indeed to dismantle those rights.

The International Labour Organisation, the ILO, adjudicating recently upon a case presented by the NUM and the TUC, found that Britain's so-called "employment legislation" is in conflict with the international law. The Tory Government's policies thus stand side-by-side with those of Iran, Argentina, Turkey and Chile.

Employers' uses of the law have now reached grotesque proportions as we've seen in recent weeks with the dockers and railway workers. The Government's purpose is clearly to outlaw effective trade unionism.

Our movement continues to accept this legislation at our peril. It is time that we took a conscious and responsible decision to defy unjust and oppressive laws, and pledge support for all workers who find themselves confronting the State's misuse of the judicial process. The trade union movement demonstrated in 1971 that it was not prepared to accept anti-trade union legislation. There is no reason why the trade union movement in 1989 should not adopt a similar position.

In the massive fight-back which is essential to protecting trade unionism, and all civil liberties, the NUM should be in the vanguard. I feel sad that the ballot last December on industrial action over our right to collective bargaining on wages was lost. What a powerful position both the NUM and other trade unions would be in if we were lined up alongside other workers in the fight to retain or regain collective bargaining rights at national level.

We lost the ballot last December because of that internecine warfare to which I earlier referred, British Coal must take pleasure in sitting back and watching sections of the NUM savage each other instead of mobilising to deal with our common enemy and protect our members.

Our struggle against injustice is of course not only national but international, and on the international stage the British miners have long played a leading role.

It was the vision and solidarity of our forebears which led the MFGB and the NUM into supporting all major international struggles for a better world throughout the last century.

In 1913, we supported Irish workers in the Dublin Lock-Out. In 1917, we supported the Soviet workers who overthrew the Tsar. In the '30's we supported workers of Spain struggling valiantly for democracy. In the decades since the Second World War, we have supported liberation struggles around the world, including those of Vietnam and Nicaragua. And we have always supported our brothers and sisters in South Africa and Namibia fighting to overcome the evil of apartheid.

Today, faced with the international web of multi-national corporations, it is imperative that trade unionists unite with appropriate strategies.

There is no better way for us to express our international solidarity and our international commitment than by being members of the International Miners' Organisation. The IMO now has over six and a half million members with 44 countries affiliated. It is the largest international mining organisation ever seen and its involvement in struggles from Morocco to South Africa, from Colombia to the Phillipines, has signalled not only to the working class but to the multi-national corporations that the IMO is an organisation which is powerful and effective.

As major struggles for democracy and peace take place around the world, while workers fight for basic rights, wages and conditions, we must reaffirm our own beliefs, our commitment to Socialist policies and the building of a world at peace.

As we enter our second century as a National Union, we should be resolute and optimistic about the future which is ours to construct. When faced with set-backs we should remember not only world heroes such as Nelson Mandela but all those prepared to sacrifice their freedom and their lives for principle.

The fight for our industry and our Trade Union will be hard, The road towards a Socialist Britain will not be easy, but it is our responsibility to create the conditions in which our dreams and those of our forefathers become reality for the generations ahead.

Let me take this opportunity of thanking the delegates to this Conference and the members of this Union for allowing me the honour of being President of this great Union. (*Applause*)