

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

MR. P.E. HEATHFIELD (Secretary): At this point, delegates, I wish to call upon the President to give his annual address to Conference. Thank you, the President.
(Applause)

CHAIRMAN: Mr. Secretary and comrades, I promise you once again that this Presidential Address will be non-controversial, will avoid dealing with those areas of contention, and I am certain will not give one single line of copy to the media, radio or television.

A few weeks ago, Sir Robert Haslam (now Lord Haslam) announced that there was to be a further rundown of *7½ thousand jobs in our industry*. This, he said, was due to the "inevitable" cutback and cash flow position following negotiations with the two new privatised electricity generating companies.

The new criteria to be applied in the industry are to be based on "cash flow". This change means in essence that pits which have been profitable could find themselves candidates for closure – even though in reality they are economic, have long-life reserves and are essential to the community.

For example: a colliery which produces coal at a profit but finds that due to its geographical location it is unable to sell that coal to a generating company and as a consequence has to stock that coal could be in a position where the stocking charges and a temporary failure to sell at that period could materially, and adversely affect its "cash flow" position and thus could be faced with closure.

The new criteria is based on Tory political dogma, and has nothing to do with sensible economics – it spells another round of butchery for our industry.

Haslam said that a reduction in manpower of *7½ thousand* would take place over the next three years. Yet within weeks, colliery closures and manpower reductions are proceeding at an alarming rate.

This is not surprising. it follows a pattern which has been repeated time and time again in this industry. It is also, tragically, in line with the projections I have made since 1982.

In 1982, we had *192 thousand* men, and were told that if we agreed to a reduction of *23 thousand* men and *23* pit closures, the industry could save *£200 million* per year as well as saving other jobs and giving stability to our industry.

I warned at the time that the Coal Board's intention was to close *70* pits and axe *70 thousand* jobs. Within a short space of time following the end of the year long strike, the number of collieries had gone down to *122*, and manpower had dropped by *70 thousand*.

This in turn was followed by the further closure of *50* pits and the destruction of a further *52 thousand* jobs.

In 1988, I warned that the intention of Government and British Coal was to reduce our industry to just *50* pits and *50 thousand* jobs with an annual output of *50 million* tonnes.

Haslam's most recent announcement has now set this industry on target for those figures and much worse.

The truth behind the "economics" of the Tory Government is exposed by examining what has really taken place since 1984.

In 1984, the Tories and the Coal Board claimed that their policy of closing only *23* so-called "uneconomic" pits would save the industry *£200 million* per year.

On that basis, they should have saved at least *£1,000 million* over the past six years.

But instead – as a result of their policy and the provocation which led to the miners' strike in 1984/85 *total losses are between £12 and £15 billion* including the social consequences of pit closures alongside the destruction of mining communities.

There was never any sane economic reason for attacking our industry. This was a politically motivated attack by a government determined to destroy the National Union of Mineworkers.

The 1984/85 dispute was among the most noble ever undertaken anywhere. It was not about wages, it was not about material gain, it was about saving an industry, jobs and communities.

We warned at the time that the fate of other industries and other workers depended on effective support for our struggle. *Today, it is no source of comfort to me to read of British Steel's intention to close Ravenscraig in Scotland, where steelworkers were promised a safe and secure future provided they went through miners' picket lines in 1984/85.*

The price of crossing picket lines is clear – it weakens the entire trade union movement and weakens workers in the fight against a united oppressor. That is one of the most important lessons of the 1984/85 strike.

ENVIRONMENT

For years, our industry has been attacked by a variety of forces and a variety of arguments. Our opponents have told us that we were uncompetitive, uneconomical and unnecessary.

In the 60's, both Tory and Labour Governments were kneeling at the altar of so-called "cheap" oil from the Middle East, a policy which led to the widespread destruction of the mining industry, turning miners into industrial gypsies. Equally important, the oil crisis of the 70's cost Britain's taxpayers £4 billion more than an energy programme based on British coal would have cost.

After that, we were told that the prime source of energy should be nuclear power! It was (we were told) cheap, safe, clean and necessary. *That lie has been exposed.* Nuclear power is twice as expensive as coal. The disasters at Chernobyl and Windscale demonstrate how unsafe it is – with a projection that a quarter of a million are likely to die from the Chernobyl disaster alone, and future generations will be affected genetically as a result of this uncontrollable evil.

More recently, we have seen some strange new converts to the environmentalist cause (which we have been part of for years). Having lost the case for oil imports on economic and supply grounds – and having lost the case for nuclear power on economic, safety *and* environmental grounds, the anti-coal lobby now tries to sell the concept that environmentally friendly forms of energy exclude coal.

Mrs Thatcher parading as a "friend of the environment" is like the wolf telling Red Riding Hood that being eaten would be good for her.

The Tories are utterly hypocritical in their stance on the environment. For example, they conveniently lump together all the different forms of pollution contributing to the "greenhouse effect". They are fully aware (but say little) of the fact that lorries and motorcars contribute heavily to carbon dioxide emissions. On the other hand, they talk non-stop about burning coal, when they know that:

1. acid rain can be eliminated with gas desulphurisation units fitted to our power stations, and
2. environmentally friendly coal-fired stations utilising the fluidised bed concept could reduce emissions dramatically.

Any government serious about the environment would be pursuing these policies instead of seeking to destroy one of Britain's most vital assets.

The Tories have demonstrated their hypocrisy by closing low sulphur pits in Scotland and South Wales – then increasing coal imports on the grounds of low sulphur content!

Britain needs an energy policy that not only sees the phasing out of all nuclear power stations but a ban on ALL coal imports, and the development and expansion of the British coal mining industry, with the environmentally friendly burning of British coal.

The Labour Party should make such an energy policy a key feature of its General Election programme, it will prove that Labour is serious about the environment and the economy.

WAGES

This year, our Conference will be adopting a resolution demanding an increase in basic wages. I want to say to all delegates, in a spirit of comradeship that they should not adopt such a resolution if they are not prepared to carry it through within a few months of its adoption.

You know that the multiplicity of different wages systems currently being pushed through by British Coal are designed to exploit the workforce and achieve a position of power for management while weakening the N.U.M.'s position.

We all hear many comments about our members being fed up and contemptuous of British Coal management – so disillusioned that many of them are ready to leave the industry.

I understand that frustration, and far from blaming them, say very firmly that the responsibility for getting out of this malaise rests with this Conference and the Union leadership.

I know that when leadership is given, members respond. The 1987 ballot on the disciplinary code was a clear example of this: this ballot, held three years after the 1984/85 strike produced a massive vote in favour of industrial action. The tragedy was that this mandate was "thrown away" by a collective leadership which did not apparently realise the strength and power they held in their hands.

When we present our wage claim to British Coal we should do so on the basis that we insist on negotiating that claim, and a failure to respond, with whatever consequences, will be the responsibility of British Coal.

If the Corporation can sit down and talk to this Union on a bilateral basis on consultation, there is no logical reason that they cannot sit down and talk to us on matters of conciliation – including a wages claim.

But they do not want a conciliation scheme unless it is one which recognises the breakaway U.D.M., because they want to continue exploiting divisions inside the mining industry.

The way to end divisions is by, first, having an expression of total unity at this Conference – and let's end once and for all the suggestion that we are prepared to entertain any recognition of the U.D.M.

Once British Coal are aware that we speak with one voice on this matter it will concentrate their minds wonderfully on the need for a conciliation scheme between them and the N.U.M.

Britain's miners, with enormous increases in productivity, have every right to seek a £15,000 minimum wage on a salary basis for face-workers with consequential increases for all the grades in the industry.

I repeat that whilst the demand for decent wages is imperative, I do not want to see Conference adopting a resolution in July, 1990 – and then changing its mind when the going gets rough in or around October/November this year.

If we really mean what we say, then we must ensure that any resolution we adopt is prosecuted to a satisfactory conclusion.

TRADE UNION LEGISLATION

During the past 11 years of the Thatcher Government, we have seen seven different pieces of legislation designed to weaken the British trade union movement.

As a consequence of these employment laws, trade unions have been effectively denied the right to take strike action without the most restrictive and onerous conditions .

Secondary action has been ruled out, so that one trade union cannot give assistance to another involved in an industrial dispute with either a national or international company and, effectively, picketing itself has been virtually outlawed.

Trade unions are no longer free to elect their officials and executive committees in accordance with their rule books, but must operate in accordance with law designed by the Tory Party. The Tories do not even have a ballot for Chairman – indeed, Mrs. Thatcher appoints whoever she wishes to be chairman of her Party.

Much of the anti-union legislation has been produced as a ruling class response to the miners' strikes of 1972, 1974 and 1984/85.

Nearly six years ago, in 1984, we saw for the first time in British trade union history the appointment of a Receiver to take control of the Union's assets.

This led our Union – just like “Star Trek” – into areas where no union has even before.

In order to beat the effects of sequestration and receivership the N.U.M. National Officials set up an elaborate network of accounts. Between 1984 and 1988, the Union operated against the background of the strike, sequestration and receivership and a major breach of trust action brought against the three National Officials and three Trustees of the Mineworkers' Trust.

Recent untrue media allegations that the two National Officials had used monies donated to the Union or for the benefit of its members to pay off a personal mortgage and a loan led to an independent inquiry conducted by Mr. Gavin Lightman Q.C.

1. The Lightman Inquiry cleared the National Officials of the scurrilous allegation that we used monies donated to the N.U.M. and its members to pay off personal mortgages and loans.
2. The Inquiry cleared us of the allegation of using monies donated for the benefit of the N.U.M. to pay for home improvement loans and accepted that this was paid with personal monies.
3. The Inquiry did criticise me and the Secretary for accepting, months after the end of the strike, a personal loan from the Miners' Trade Union International and the I.M.O. without obtaining the *prior* consent of the N.E.C. However the Inquiry agrees that I repaid my loan in full plus interest and donated 8 months salary to the N.U.M.'s funds, *a total payment equal to an interest rate of 16%* and that the Secretary will repay his loan with interest in accordance with the agreement.

Having been cleared of these allegations, we now see the media using technical criticisms of the Officials in the Inquiry report to seek to discredit us.

The National Officials explained that during the strike and through the period of sequestration and receivership monies were received in cash from a wide range of sources including British trade union loans – to “maintain the fabric of the Union”.

The Inquiry correctly concluded that these monies – including trade union loans which were made available to the National Officials who operated a Miners' Action Committee cash fund – *were given by the donors with the intention of evading an obligation to account to the Receiver or the sequestrators*

The Inquiry makes clear that as a matter of law *these monies (loans)* given by unions like the Transport and General Workers' Union and Fire Brigades Union and others, should have been handed over to the Receiver and sequestrators .

The Inquiry confirms that had the network of accounts been revealed at any time between 1984 and December 1989, trade union loans given to sustain our Union should as a matter of law have been handed over to the sequestrators or Receiver and they would not have been repayable to the T.G.W.U., F.B.U., N.U.P.E., etc. as a matter of law by the N.U.M. after the discharge of the Receiver in July, 1986.

I believe that not one Delegate in this Conference will disagree with me when I say that those trade union loans were made available to sustain our organisation – not to be handed over to the sequestrators or Receiver.

I also believe that every Delegate will agree that there was an obligation to repay these loans which were a debt of honour – signed for by the N.U.M. Scottish Area.

Those unions advanced money to help our Union survive in a most difficult period and we who operated the separate Miners' Action Committee account had an obligation to repay them, and repay them we did along with the payment of N.U.M. creditors and a donation to the Solidarity Fund.

There has been much speculation (especially in the media) about monies from the Soviet Union, and I want to make clear that the N.U.M. never received any monies from the Soviet Miners' Union. I understand, on the basis of what I have been told, that the Soviet Miners' Union sent \$1 million to the Miners' Trade Union International based in Warsaw on the clear understanding that it had to be used for international purposes in a fund operated by the M.T.U.I.

The M.T.U.I. in turn donated these monies along with others to an international trust fund which it had established in Dublin to benefit miners anywhere including, of course, British miners.

Since that fund was opened, to date £1,050,000 has been withdrawn from it – and the Lightman Inquiry report itself accepts that 83.5% of that money has been expended for the benefit of the N.U.M. or given to the Miners' Solidarity Fund for our victimised members.

Other payments have been made, which we claim have also been for the benefit of the N.U.M. in line with N.E.C. decisions or Union policy. If these payments are accepted (for example, financial assistance to the South African miners), over 90% of all monies withdrawn from this fund have been expended for the benefit of the N.U.M. or its members

In any event, the money is all accounted for and approximately £1.8 million is still in that fund for the use of miners including British miners.

The decision not to reveal details of the various accounts was taken not only to ensure that loans could be repaid to other trade unions, but followed the pattern set by the N.E.C. itself, which decided in March, 1984 not to publish the detailed Minutes of the special secret meeting which took place in the Royal Victoria Hotel in Sheffield – a meeting which decided to locate Union monies abroad and instruct the National Officials to implement those recommendations and decisions .

The Daily Mirror today claims under a banner headline that the legal document prepared by the Union's solicitors in relation to Mr Roger Windsor's £29,500 loan was a forgery. It is claimed that this document – which was taken away by Mr. Windsor and brought back with signatures on it and sent to the Union's solicitors – was not signed by Mr. Windsor, his wife or witnesses.

This took place in 1987 and no doubt Mr. Windsor who took the document away and brought it back with signatures on it can explain what took place.

The Daily Mirror goes on to claim that Mr. Windsor's debt of £29,500 is owed to the miners and their families – the I.M.O., the National Executive Committee, Mr. Lightman's Inquiry and the National Officials all agree. No doubt Mr. Windsor having failed to repay his debt for six years will now do so without any further delay.

The Mirror in its comment column states that in relation to a forgery we should call in the police.

We did – in respect of another – forgery last October. So far, nine months later Mr. Windsor has apparently not accepted the invitation of the police to help them in their inquiries.

No doubt he intends to do so – we shall see.

I, along with others, did everything in my power to avoid the impact of sequestration and receivership. I did everything to ensure that we pay all N.U.M. creditors, repay every single trade union loan and ensure that £135,000 was paid into the fund for victimised miners.

We believe everything we did was for the benefit of our Union, and I apologise to no one for the role I have played during a period which has been tantamount to a state of war against everything we represent.

The General Secretary and I have been subjected to an unprecedented trial by media, and I conclude this Address by asking you for your support. It is a privilege to be President of the National Union of Mineworkers. (*Standing ovation*)