

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

MR. P. E. HEATHFIELD (Secretary): Could I on behalf of Conference invite the President to address the Conference. *(Applause)*

THE PRESIDENT (Mr. A. Scargill): Colleagues, this is my tenth Presidential Address since taking office in 1982, and they have certainly been a momentous 10 years.

Over the past 13 years. Britain has been ruled by a Tory Government which has ruthlessly implemented economic, social and political measures that have damaged and devastated the lives of millions of people.

We have seen unemployment rise dramatically; we have seen bankruptcies, closures, destruction of major industries and economic recession on a scale not known since the 1930's. We have over three million people (in real terms) unemployed, over ten million living on or below the poverty line, and we have become accustomed to the disgraceful sight of thousands of homeless people on the streets in our major cities.

There have been savage attacks on our social services, health service and education system, and a massive privatisation programme which has creamed off for private enterprise assets which belong to the British people.

There has been a rising tide of helplessness, hopelessness and despair as poverty, deprivation and social chaos engulf our society.

Britain's coal industry has not been immune from the Tory Government's obsession with monetarist philosophy. Since the end of the miners' strike in 1985, we have experienced a vicious closure programme which has butchered 101 pits and 115,000 jobs.

We are, however, not alone. Over the past 12 years, the steel industry has been even more savagely butchered than coal, with a loss of 150,000 jobs and a massive closure of plants. Only last week, British Steel announced still more closures and more jobs to be destroyed.

British Rail has continued to axe the railway network and about 100,000 railway workers' jobs have disappeared since the early 80's. The engineering, motor-car, textile and ship-building industries among others have been devastated.

Since my last Presidential Address, eight more pits have closed, and 8,000 jobs have been lost, while the Corporation has scheduled still more closures in the coming months.

British Coal have shown slavish devotion to Tory Government policies. There is no longer any pretence about so-called "uneconomic" pits, reserves of coal, or even reference to safety as pretexts for closure. The Corporation's criteria are now obvious even to those most critical of the N.U.M. and its leadership.

I warn that butchery will go on – unless our Union reasserts itself and fights for the survival of the industry with the same determination we saw between 1982 and 1985.

If our Union is not prepared to fight to retain pits and jobs and if there is no change in the political outlook of central government, then by the late 1990's the industry will be reduced to 30 pits and 30,000 men.

We are witnessing economic and political lunacy on the part of British Coal and the Tory Government. We have no energy policy; we have no plan for the future, and the short-sighted approach of this Government is seen clearly even in its attitude to environmental protection.

It has been common knowledge for some years that, in 1993, new E.E.C. regulations will govern power station emissions, and that in order to conform to these regulations, gas desulphurisation units must be fitted to our coal-fired power stations.

In addition to the use of the new technology, low sulphur coal is required. The combination of low sulphur coal and gas desulphurisation units would make a tremendous contribution towards a safer environment, demonstrating just how good clean coal technology really is.

However, the Tories have not only refused to provide cash to fit gas desulphurisation units to the power stations – but over the past five years they and British Coal have closed 53 top quality low-sulphur producing pits!

What mentally is it that, first, closes some of the finest low-sulphur pits in the world and, then, argues in favour of increased coal imports on the grounds that Britain's mining industry cannot provide low-sulphur coal?

Coal imports cost Britain's taxpayers hundreds of millions of pounds, adversely affecting our balance of payments. Further, we know that imported coal which appears to be "cheap" is either produced with slave labour or child labour, or is "cheap" as a result of subsidies by private coal companies and/or governments determined to pay whatever price necessary to capture a slice of the world market.

Those in British Coal's senior management who have been responsible for the lunacy of closing low-sulphur-coal producing pits (indeed, *all* pits), including those in Scotland, South Wales and Kent, should be sacked.

One of the first tasks of the new Labour Government must *be to dismiss the whole of British Coal's management at Board level, and replace it with a management team committed to nationalisation and to the establishment of good industrial relations.*

What the Corporation has done is adopt macho management tactics which have had horrendous consequences, socially as well as economically.

The hypocrisy of the Tory Government's "market philosophy" can be seen clearly when Tories argue that Britain's coal industry – regardless of its workforce – must respond to market forces and sell energy as cheaply as possible.

And yet – the Tories continue to keep open expensive dangerous nuclear power stations which produce electricity some two to three times more expensively than coal.

To base Britain's energy needs on imported fuel or expensive nuclear power is sheer insanity; if nothing else, the experience of the 1970's oil crisis, which cost British taxpayers billions, should ensure that we pull back from making the same mistake again.

We need an energy policy, incorporating clean coal technology, with an annual output of 150 million tonnes of coal. At the same time, we need the introduction of an effective conservation programme which develops alternative energy sources such as wind, wave, tide, geothermal, hydro and solar power.

Britain needs the regeneration of our industry, whose resources should be used for the benefit of the economy and of society as a whole. This can only be done provided there is a willingness to plan ahead – and plan not only for coal production but also for coal utilisation.

The next Labour Government should make one of its first tasks the introduction of a new plan for coal based upon the principles of the 1974 Plan for Coal which was destroyed by the Thatcher Government in the early 80's.

In addition to developing a plan for the industry itself, we need to plan for the long-term future and security of those people who produce the coal.

Irrespective of which government is in office, it is essential that our union meets its on-going responsibility for winning the best terms and conditions for those it represents.

Wages are a central element in people's lives. We have to campaign to achieve a wage for our members that is commensurate with the task performed.

In my Presidential Address last year, I said that I did not want to see Conference adopting resolutions in July only to change its mind when the going got tough in October/November.

Last July, Conference adopted a resolution on wages which instructed the Officials and the N.E.C. to enter into negotiations with British Coal in order to achieve an increase of £30 per week on basic pay, and the consolidation of incentive earnings into basic rates in 1990/91.

The resolution gave an instruction that if we failed to achieve this demand, a Special Delegate Conference should be convened with a view to consulting the membership on industrial action.

British Coal – not surprisingly – refused to negotiate with our union, and a Special Delegate Conference on the 11th October, 1990, agreed we should ballot the membership, seeking support for the policy decision taken at Conference in July.

We failed to get a majority vote in that ballot, and I think it is pertinent that we ask ourselves why.

It is a matter of regret – indeed of great sadness – that some Areas either refrained from campaigning in support of Union policy or actively campaigned against it.

I am absolutely convinced that if we had all worked vigorously in support of the Union policy on wages, we would have been successful in forcing British Coal to the negotiating table – *and* we would have secured a decent increase in pay in line with the demands expressed at our Annual Conference last year.

I repeat that I am sick and tired of seeing Conference adopt a positive wages resolution and, within a few months, seeing that same resolution sabotaged.

If Conference is not willing to campaign for its wages resolution and for industrial action if necessary, then don't support a resolution calling for industrial action.

One of the arguments used by those who opposed the decision taken at the Special Delegate Conference last October was that the N.U.M. does not have a conciliation scheme. True! – the N.C.B. unilaterally scrapped an agreed scheme over five years ago.

I am of the view that we would have been able to win a conciliation scheme based upon a membership concept giving our union the right to negotiate and represent all its members – had we been working together vigorously to achieve that goal.

There are those within our Union who still advocate acceptance of British Coal's majority/minority conciliation scheme, and claim that it is better to be "in there" negotiating even if it means that we do so wholly on the Corporation's terms.

The majority/minority scheme means that the N.U.M. must accept that our members in areas like Notts and sections of the Midlands would have their wages and conditions negotiated by the breakaway U.D.M.

Acceptance of the majority/minority scheme or a joint scheme, would mean the loss of the protection we now have for claiming equal wages under Section 23 of the Employment Protection Act.

No trade union can possibly give away the right to represent its members. We have every right to demand a conciliation scheme giving our union recognition and representation for our members.

Why is British Coal not prepared to agree a majority/minority scheme on a national basis? The answer to that question is obvious – it would give the N.U.M. sole negotiating and representation rights for all mineworkers.

Having insisted that they would only accept a scheme based on the majority/minority concept at unit level, the Corporation adopt a completely contradictory position for Weekly Paid Industrial Staff in the industry. Here, too, the answer to their behaviour is obvious.

The Corporation is well aware that if it introduced for W.P.I.S. the same conciliation arrangements as for mineworkers at unit level, the U.D.M. would have no representation. So, the Corporation insisted on a joint scheme on a national basis in order to give the U.D.M. representation.

When the N.U.M. rejected this approach, the Corporation promptly gave sole W.P.I.S. negotiating rights to the U.D.M. – even though the breakaway represents less than 10% of Weekly Paid Industrial Staff members.

These examples show clearly what the politics are behind British Coal's strategy. The policy is to attack and weaken the N.U.M.

I am absolutely convinced that if we had seen a united fight by our Union and all its Areas for a conciliation scheme based upon the Union's proposals, a scheme would now be well established.

It is downright immoral for anyone in our Union to continue to undermine the N.U.M.'s democratically determined position on the conciliation issue – after all, we have taken 23 decisions on the matter already.

There have been rumours that some Areas may ask British Coal for an Area conciliation scheme based upon the majority/minority concept. Such rumours evoke bitter memories of the tactics adopted by Nottinghamshire and South Derbyshire in 1977 in pursuit of Area incentive schemes.

Those tactics, which were fiercely and rightly resisted by Areas such as South Wales, Scotland, Kent, and Yorkshire, led to massive divisions in our union – divisions which had a profound effect on the strike of 1984/85, and which are still with us today.

We must ensure that the N.U.M. never again makes that mistake.

Our union needs to campaign for a four-day week, retirement at 50 on the same terms and conditions as were afforded to those who took redundancy in 1985/86; at least time-and-a-third unsocial hours' payment; a guarantee of full wages if miners are off work sick or injured. If these benefits are good enough for British Coal senior personnel, trade union officials and Members of Parliament, then they're good enough for mineworkers.

Our campaign for jobs, wages and conditions must not be divorced from a campaign against the Tory Government's plan to privatise the industry. I do not regard privatisation as inevitable. If this union is prepared to resist, privatisation can be stopped.

Britain's coal industry with its rich resources and its enormous potential for strengthening the British economy should not be owned by multinational corporations whose only interest is profit.

We saw only last week what electricity privatisation has produced – pay rises of 163% for Powergen's Chief Executive and 180% for the head of National Power, along with the news that Powergen is discussing investing millions in two power stations – in Portugal.

It is essential that the next Labour Government not only reaffirms its belief in nationalisation, but declares that true nationalisation is much more than ownership by the State.

In order for our industry – or indeed any industry – to function properly and effectively, it must be *controlled* by those who want to see it succeed.

It cannot be left to civil servants in Whitehall, or to entrepreneurs from outside. It must be in the hands of people who are committed to the principle of nationalisation and to the long-term interests of the British people.

When the Tories came to power 12 years ago, they set about creating mass unemployment, and destroying effective trade unionism by anti-union laws. Any sign that trade unionism is not yet totally subservient, and this Government will rush in with new laws to plug the gap.

Sooner, rather than later, the British trade union movement will have to make up its mind. It will either have to acquiesce all the restraints imposed by unjust laws – or it will have to resist as did the pioneers who built our movement over a century ago.

Some time within the next year there will be a general election – and we must work to elect a Labour Government ... a Labour Government that will, hopefully, regenerate Britain's economy, revive our health service, re-build our education, welfare and transport systems.

This can only happen provided a Labour Government pursues a socialist policy.

In the past, the election of a Labour Government has given us the unsavoury spectacle of the Labour Party leadership trying to run capitalism better than the Tories.

I did not join the Labour Party over 25 years ago to help run a rotten capitalist system more efficiently than the Tories. I joined the Party to abolish capitalism, and implement Clause 4 of the Constitution.

Over the past period, sadly, we have seen the Labour leadership abandon basic principles, arguing step by step that they have to do so in order to win the next general election. This approach has been translated into criticism or attack on those in the Labour movement who stick to those basic principles.

That attack has built up until we've reached the point where all who take action to protect jobs, industries, services ... or to get rid of the poll tax! ... are branded as "loony lefts".

Policies such as nationalisation and unilateralism are ditched along the way whilst the E.C.C. and the City of London are courted,. And , finally, you end up with the grotesque spectacle of a Labour Leader ... a Labour leader ... supporting privatisation in Liverpool.

We need a Labour Government which will rekindle the flame of nationalism and implement Clause 4 of its Constitution; a Labour Government which will re-nationalise all those industries which have been plundered and privatised by the Tory Government during the past 12 years.

A Labour Government which will nationalise the commanding heights of our economy, including the banks and insurance companies; a Labour Government committed to the repeal of *all* trade union legislation introduced by the Tories since 1979.

Only a Labour Government committed to socialist policies can rebuild Britain's shattered manufacturing and industrial base and start to restore stability throughout our devastated society and economy. That is why the entire movement should be working for the election of a Labour Government committed to a socialist policy.

Over the past year, our union has not only had to fight against attacks on the industry and our members' wages and conditions, but it has faced a smear campaign against the national leadership, the like of which has never been seen in the British trade union movement.

The media hysteria against Peter Heathfield and myself sprang from an operation set up to destroy us, and all who contributed towards it or participated in it know that to be the case.

A subsequent independent inquiry declared that the personal financial smears against Peter and myself were entirely untrue.

Legal action commenced against the two National Officials was discontinued in September 1990. The I.M.O. agreed to a formula proposed by the N.U.M. which provided for the I.M.O. to assist the N.U.M. through a donation of £742,000 (money which would have been paid over the next few years to the Miners' Solidarity Fund), the N.U.M. withdrawing all litigation and claims against the I.M.O. and the National Officials, and giving an undertaking that no new claims of any kind would be made. Finally in June this year a case brought against the union and the two National Officials by the Certification Officer collapsed when the prosecution was unable to offer any evidence.

The financial assistance from the I.M.O. has certainly been required, because to date the Lightman Inquiry and its recommendations including the abandoned legal action against the N.U.M. National Officials, have cost the union in excess of £500,000.

In the face of the allegations and the aftermath of the inquiry, Peter and I did the only thing we could. We made ourselves available to Areas and Branches, to give our side of the story and answer any questions posed.

We set out to campaign and defend ourselves, but at the same time we were defending every principle that this union has symbolised.

Make no mistake, the attempt to destroy us has been a political attack from start to finish – and I do not believe it is finished by a long way.

We have not seen the last of this extraordinary attempt to discredit the National Officials. The trial by media which we endured for a year was, and is, part of a determined effort to destroy the Union's national leadership.

It has been an attack which has sought to destroy the magnificent achievement of the struggle of 1984/85. It has been an attempted warning to other trade unions who seek to defend their members, their industries and services.

The past year has seen a further important vindication of the stand taken by the National officials and the Union itself.

Seven years after the "battle of Orgreave" 39 of our members have been awarded a total of half a million pounds in damages and costs for assault, wrongful arrest and malicious prosecution.

It has taken seven long years for part of the truth to emerge and yet to date, not one police officer has been charged or prosecuted and no senior politician has been charged for any offences in connection with the confrontation at Orgreave.

I hope that the senior Labour Party leaders and trade union leaders who were so forthright in condemning our membership at Orgreave for so-called 'violence' in 1984, will show the same determination in calling for a public inquiry and insisting that all those in the police force and Government who were responsible are brought to book.

I also hope that those M.P.'s who so vociferously criticised Peter Heathfield and myself over the past year, are equally vociferous in supporting the call for a public inquiry to ensure that those responsible for the assault, wrongful imprisonment and malicious prosecution of our members at Orgreave are brought to trial.

I have constantly been attacked by the establishment and mass media for advocating policies which are based upon socialist principles. I have been attacked for not criticising our members at Orgreave in 1984.

I want to make it absolutely clear to this Conference that I was elected to fight for our members and not condemn them, and to advocate policies based upon a socialist concept. I will continue to do everything in my power to advocate class policies and in doing so, support the finest union membership in the world. *(applause)*.