

CHAIRMAN: (Mr. F. Cave, Vice-President, National Union of Mineworkers): Comrades, my first duty is to invite the President to present his Presidential Address to this year's Conference. President. (*Applause*)

THE PRESIDENT: Chairman, colleagues, could I say that before I commence my Presidential Address it would be appropriate if on your behalf this Conference were to send a message to Michael McGahey, the former Vice-President of the National Union of Mineworkers and former President of the Scottish Area, who as you are aware has been seriously ill. I am pleased to say that he has now left hospital, but I think it would be appropriate if all of us sent Michael all the very best for a speedy recovery to full health. I hoped he could have been here. I have not seen him, but I am sure that we are all glad that he is on his way to full recovery. (*Hear, hear*) (*Applause*)

The past ten years have seen devastation wreaked on the British Mining Industry. A Tory Government - whose motivation has been and is blind ideological hatred of the N.U.M. - has rampaged through the coalfields with no thought for the economy, for our communities or for the energy needs of Britain.

By 1992, with so much damage already done, the Tories dropped all pretence of economic logic as they attacked our industry. The privatisation of electricity forced them to admit the true costs of nuclear power and coal imports, while it was revealed that British Gas had been prepared to make a massive loss of over £500 million in order to ensure the spread of gas-fired power stations.

It was conceded that nuclear power generated electricity was 350 percent more expensive than coal, and it is now accepted that the bill for de-commissioning costs could be substantially higher than that given in evidence to the Trade and Industry Select Committee. In other words, the cost of electricity generated by nuclear power could be as much as 500% more expensive than by coal, or the equivalent of nearly £100 per tonne subsidy.

The Report and Accounts of National Power have confirmed the NUM's evidence that electricity produced by gas is 30% more expensive than coal and all the indications are that British Gas (which will exhaust within 20 years) will continue to escalate in cost.

The change in international Exchange Rates together with the dramatically increased productivity rates in the British mining industry means the delivered price of British coal is at least 30% cheaper than imported coal. If the direct and indirect subsidies afforded to foreign coal producers including transport costs are taken into account, British coal is infinitely cheaper than its international competitors.

The slaughter of our industry has been industrial genocide at its very worst. British Coal and the Tory Government have not been content to close pits, they are

determined to remove all evidence that mining and mining communities ever existed. Their haste to level a closed colliery reflects their desire to remove all evidence of resistance against this butchery - resistance inspired by the National Union of Mineworkers and the magnificent Women Against Pit Closures Movement. This year is the 10th anniversary of the 1984/85 miners' strike. It is right that we remember the sacrifice of our members and their families in pursuit of one of the noblest causes ever seen in trade unionism, the fight for jobs, pits, communities and human dignity.

It is also the 20th anniversary of the 1974 miners' strike and it is right that we examine the two disputes and compare what took place.

Ten years on from 1984 we have seen the butchery of our industry, the de-industrialisation of Britain, the destruction of our health, education and social services and a society which has been plunged into utter desolation and despair.

There are over five million unemployed, ten million on or below the poverty line and the achievements of the 1945-1951 Labour Government have been or are being systematically dismantled by a Government which has a blind ideological hatred of our Union and Socialist philosophy in general.

The attack on our industry in 1984 had nothing to do with economic or energy policy, it was not about the N.C.B. wanting to close a few pits or help balance the books. It was about a Tory Government intent on trying to destroy the National Union of Mineworkers. Margaret Thatcher and Peter Walker, have conceded this and Lord Marshall has said he saw it as a "war".

The tragedy is that the Labour and trade union leaderships - with a few honourable exceptions - failed to understand or refused to accept that it was a class war which could have been won decisively in a matter of weeks. Only now, a decade later, is there an admission that the Tories prevented a settlement. We have evidence that the Tory Government agreed to settle the dispute in October 1984 on terms proposed by the National Union of Mineworkers but that N.A.C.O.D.S. - for reasons which have never been made clear - threw away this opportunity to secure total victory. The NUM continued to fight on virtually alone and yet it has now emerged that when the strike was finally called off we were so close to victory.

The helplessness and hopelessness amongst our people today is a reflection of the failure by the then Labour and trade union leaderships to give the kind of response necessary to help Britain's miners win their campaign to save jobs, pits and communities. Had they come to our assistance as they did in 1972 and 1974 not only would we have saved our industry, but in the process have seen the election of a Labour Government.

It was a tragedy that the leadership of the Labour Party and the TUC failed to understand that the attack of the past decade on the National Union of Mineworkers has been a political attack from a Government which used every section of the state machine, including the security forces, the police, judiciary and media as they sought to crush Britain's miners.

There was a failure from sections of our movement to understand that if they did not support our Union the way would be open for a Tory Government to unleash its fury against all other public sector workers, including those in the health, education, social services, gas, electricity and rail. The Labour Party Leader in 1984/85 was more intent on attacking miners' pickets and currying favour with the media in the hope of securing short-term electoral success, rather than giving class commitment and securing long-term political power.

In the 84/85 strike we had 13,000 arrested, 7,000 injured, 11 died and over 1,000 miners were sacked and victimised because they dared to stand up and fight back. Those who failed to come to our assistance are now paying a very heavy price indeed. It is important that they acknowledge the lessons of that experience .

Recent revelations mean that misguided academics and instant historians are having to re-evaluate their view that the miners did not succeed because they did

not hold a ballot. Those critics of our struggle have ignored the fact that in 1977 the Notts. Area defied a ballot vote on the Incentive Scheme - and now, presumably, they will refuse to face the fact that, again in Notts, a massive ballot vote against British Coal's "Flexible Working Package" has been defied as well. How can anyone ever again argue that the NUM should have had a ballot in 1984, knowing that in 1994 the U.D.M. voted 93% to reject "flexible working", and yet within two weeks 97% of its members had defied the ballot result!

Our critics are now having to accept that Thatcher actually accepted a settlement on the NUM's terms and yet because of the role of N.A.C.O.D.S. this agreement by the Emergency Cabinet was thrown away. Analysts are also having to concede that the trade union and Labour Party leaderships failed to give the same support to Britain's miners in 1984 that they had in 1974 and that if they had done, the outcome would have been a disaster and defeat for the Tory Government.

It is rare that an entire movement is given a second chance, but in October 1992, the British Labour and trade union movement was given an historic opportunity to help save Britain's truncated mining industry from further slaughter. We saw protests from Chesterfield to Cheltenham with demonstrations of over a quarter of a million in London - yet the Labour and trade union leaderships seemed paralysed with fear.

If only they had called upon the whole trade union and Labour movement to stop work (as I requested on behalf of the NUM) then Major's Government would have been finished and the misery of the past 15 years would have been at an end.

It has cost over £2.5 billion in redundancy and associated costs to close 32 pits, and probably twice as much in power, rail and associated industries - indeed it is estimated that the Tories have spent over £50 billion since 1984 trying to destroy the NUM and its leadership.

PRIVATISATION

The Tories have continued with their programme of privatising the British Coal Industry, a policy which they described as the "ultimate privatisation."

As they drive towards privatisation they have slimmed down the industry to 16 pits with a workforce of around 14,000 and in spite of producing the cheapest deep mine coal in the world are using competing fuels such as nuclear, gas and coal imports thereby costing the consumers over £2 billion per year more than would be the case if they relied on British Coal. We have the obscene situation of British Coal importing coal they can no longer produce because of their pit closure programme - a policy that really represents the economics of the madhouse!

The Tories' policy of running down the industry enables them to sell off the real estate, i.e. land which they regard as a valuable asset for the private entrepreneurs who are determined to plunder the industry in a get rich quick policy.

Their programme envisages a small 12/14 pit industry producing between 25/30 million tonnes per year with little or no capital investment. In other words, they simply rape the pits which have been developed at tax payers' expense and squander a nation's valuable energy resource in the process.

PENSIONS PLUNDER

They are also intent on plundering the Mineworkers' Pension Scheme and Staff Superannuation Scheme despite the fact that it has been established beyond any shadow of doubt that monies in these funds are deferred wages. The latest decision by British Coal, British Coal Trustees and the U.D.M. Trustees to agree changes in the Mineworkers' Pension Scheme effectively give to the Government 50% of an £850 million actuarial surplus in 1994, a policy which represents daylight robbery. In my view it is no different from a crook like Maxwell who stole £500 million from the Mirror Group Pension Fund - the money ends up in the Company's balance sheet.

Our Union is currently supporting contributors and beneficiaries to the Pension Scheme who are bringing a case against British Coal, British Coal Trustees and the U.D.M. Trustees for the recovery of £1.2 billion taken from our Pension Scheme in the form of a contribution holiday from the actuarial surpluses generated by the

investment of our "deferred pay".

That money should be used for one purpose and one purpose only - to pay for improved pensions for retired miners, widows and other beneficiaries. The money should be used, for example, to pay a full pension at 50 to miners who have been thrown on the 'scrap heap' because of the Government's vindictive policies against the NUM.

CISWO

The changes the Government is forcing through in relation to the Coal Industry Social Welfare Organisation are an affront to all those in the industry who built a social welfare organisation of which everyone was proud. The Tories introduced legislation in Parliament in 1986 simply to enable the U.D.M. to have representation as Trustees of the Mineworkers' Pension Scheme and as Directors on the Coal Industry Social Welfare Organisation. In doing so they callously destroyed a Limited Company in which the NUM held 50 percent of the shares. It took Thatcher to reveal the full extent of the Government's involvement in supporting the Breakaway U.D.M. in relation to both the Pension Scheme and the Coal Industry Social Welfare Organisation. The next Labour Government must return both to their original status.

PACKAGE DEAL

In their inexorable drive towards privatisation, British Coal and the Tory Government did everything in their power to push through a "package deal" which involves compulsory 12-hour shifts and a six-day working week. The "package deal" paid a £6,000 taxable, non-pensionable lump sum of £4,200 nett in exchange for miners agreeing to no wage increase for three years - and flexible working.

British Coal claimed the "package" would give a guarantee as far as basic redundancy pay is concerned (redundancy pay which would only average £12,500 in any case). The Government and British Coal had to admit the deal was not binding on any successor company which went bankrupt. Indeed, in those circumstances the "guarantee" would be absolutely worthless.

The "package deal" means that a miner who has to work a compulsory 12-hour day, six-day week will be £122 worse off than a miner who currently works a voluntary 12-hour day, six-day week. No wonder a majority of miners rejected the deal and we congratulate all our members who rejected the confidence trick of British Coal and the Tory Government - a "package deal" that is aimed at lowering their living standards.

In the latest of my leaked documents from the D.T.I. it is acknowledged that the deadline for acceptance of transfer terms had passed, that a good number of NUM and U.D.M. did not accept the offer, that "they" would need to consider how the issue should be progressed, and the D.T.I. would need to seek further clarification of the position in relation to B.A.C.M. with the Treasury. In spite of assurances that miners who rejected the "package deal" would have their terms and conditions unaltered, the D.T.I. and Treasury solicitors are currently in discussion to see if a mechanism exists to alter the terms and conditions of transferring staff.

I warn that they will attempt to introduce their cheap wage policy into all sections of the privatised mining industry and it is incumbent upon this Union to defend the terms and conditions and safety standards of all our members.

WAGES

This Union has got to make up its mind about whether it continues to play a defensive role or is prepared to go on the offensive against a Government which has lost all credibility or right to govern.

For three years miners have had no increase in basic pay. It is time this Union decided to take industrial action - if necessary - to win substantial basic wage increases covering the past three years. The productivity increases - quite apart from inflation - should be sufficient to ensure that miners' wages are increased substantially and I call upon this Conference to join with all other unions, including the railway workers, which are currently fighting for justice.

Three years with no wage increase is - in part - the result of division, a division created by the leaders of the Breakaway U.D.M. and by our class enemies who supported the breakaway. The Tories are now treating the U.D.M. with contempt - but what else did they expect? Their President said he felt betrayed by British Coal and the Tory Government and he has now come to the conclusion that you cannot trust British Coal.

He now knows how our members felt when he and others like him refused to respect our picket lines in 1984/85. If they had respected our picket lines their pits would be open today.

Many miners were tricked into joining the breakaway U.D.M., but I am pleased to say that they are returning. At Asfordby half the workforce is now in the NUM whilst in North Wales every miner is back in our Union. There is a place in our Union for every miner but there can never be a place for those leaders who collaborated with British Coal and the Tories and helped our class enemies.

The Privatisation of our pits means the NUM has to face new challenges not dissimilar to those encountered by our forebears, from ruthless employers who have taken over a number of our pits and made clear they intend to use mining standards which I contend are unsafe, cut corners and reduce the high safety standards which have become the hallmark of the British mining industry.

The systematic introduction of roof bolts in place of steel arch girders is but one of the measures which the new owners will use increasingly in the industry. I have repeatedly warned that roof bolts would lead to a disaster and there can be no longer any doubt that the tragedy at Bilsthorpe was caused by roof bolts and that the subsequent H.S.E. Inquiry Report was nothing more than a "white wash".

We have challenged British Coal and the Inspectorate to build a replica tunnel, support half of it with roof bolts and half with conventional steel arch girders, then subject the whole tunnel to the geological pressure it is believed took place at Bilsthorpe. Such a test would reveal which method was safest and the fact that this experiment has not been carried out is significant and supports our view that the use of arch girders rather than roof bolts would have prevented the disaster.

I am convinced that had arch girders been used at Bilsthorpe, those men who died would have been alive today and I hope that the Public Hearing - having heard all the evidence - will come to the same conclusion. If its findings are in line with the preliminary statement of Sir Bernard Crossland who led the Hearing then the Area Director who requested the use of roof bolts and the Deputy Chief Inspector who approved their use should resign or be sacked.

Whatever the outcome, it should be remembered that it was the NUM which exposed the contradictions contained in the H.S.E. Report and which brought out the real cause of the tragedy at Bilsthorpe Colliery in August 1993.

There are around a dozen pits closed by British Coal which have been re-opened or are re-opening under license by private operators. This Union has to make clear to owners like Edwards, Budge and others including those involved in management buy-outs that nothing less than the terms, conditions and wages currently paid to our members will be acceptable for the miners at those pits. We must insist that recognition and representation are given to the NUM, and we must prepare ourselves to fight for that. It is a fight we have to win.

To meet this challenge demands a complete re-generation amongst ourselves - we must transform ourselves into, above all else, a campaigning organisation with everything to struggle for including the future of our families and communities.

Our campaign must ensure that recognition is also given to our trade union representatives with time off to do their trade union work properly. For too long we have endured harassment and intimidation and it's time we said, to both British Coal and private operators alike, enough is enough. Now is the time for this Union to fight back. Of course they will use every tactic they can against our Union including the use of every law and restriction contained in eight pieces of legislation brought in by

the Tories since 1979.

ANTI-TRADE UNION LEGISLATION

The Government's anti-trade union legislation was designed to render trade unionism ineffective and against a background of five million unemployed make it virtually impossible for unions to take industrial action. How much longer is the trade union Movement going to be frozen with fear at the thought of Tory legislation? What can they do to us? They can sequester our assets but they cannot sequester our minds, our beliefs or our faith.

It is time for this Union to fight back and there has never been a better opportunity than in the run up to privatisation. I believe that our trade union colleagues throughout the movement increasingly share our view that the Tories' laws must be defied and we must maintain pressure on the TUC to adopt a stance of non-compliance rather than submission.

We should remember that the Government's anti-trade union legislation is not only in violation of I.L.O. Conventions 87 and 96 but also in breach of the United Nations Charter on Freedom of Association. It cannot be right for a Government to interfere in the internal affairs of an independent trade union whilst at the same time their political party is free from any interference as far as its own elections are concerned and even more important where their funding comes from.

We should never forget the furore in 1990 over the false allegations about funding the NUM in the 1984/85 miners' strike. It is time we began to call for full disclosure of who funds the Tory Party both nationally and internationally and thereby supports their policies including those of mass unemployment and anti-trade union legislation.

Our struggle against the Tories at home are reflected in those of our brothers and sisters around the world, battling against the exploitation of all workers. Over the past year - despite the terrible tragedies of Somalia, East Timor, Haiti, Rwanda and what was Yugoslavia - we have seen tremendous cause for hope in the South African elections and the prospect of some justice at last for the Palestinian people.

The past year has seen the creation of a new international trade union organisation, the International Energy and Miners organisation (I.E.M.O.) bringing together energy and mineworkers world-wide in an ongoing campaign to break down the destructive Cold War divisions amongst the workers of the world. The NUM has always been internationalist in practice as well as theory. We know that peace and prosperity for workers in Britain depend on what happens in other countries.

We care deeply not only about our own troubles but about the need for a peaceful, political solution resulting in a United Ireland -or the need for a United Cyprus with Turkish troops being withdrawn.

We have internationalist as well as domestic reasons to fight for the return of a Labour Government in Britain, which is why the policies and programme of the Labour Party are so desperately important.

LABOUR PARTY LEADERSHIP

With the untimely death of John Smith, the Labour Party finds itself plunged into a Leadership contest with each of the candidates trying to out-do the other in terms of moderation, respectability and acceptability. The way in which each of the three candidates has refused to back the striking railway workers is a disgrace.

There should have been an unequivocal commitment fully supporting R.M.T. in its fight for justice. There should also have been a recognition that Labour has only achieved electoral success when it's been in support of workers in struggle or in times of economic and social crisis. The three candidates should remember that in 1974 Labour won two General Elections because of support for the NUM and not in spite of it.

If that same support had been forthcoming in 1984, I am confident the result would have been a Labour victory. There has to be a lesson for the whole of the Party and the trade union movement - the traditional link between the trade unions and Labour

Party is absolutely vital and must be strengthened not weakened.

The introduction of O.M.O.V can only be described as a disaster for democracy. To suggest that it represents one member one vote is completely untrue and the system is already excluding trade unions - including ours - (who gave birth to the party) from playing a full role, particularly in the election process within the Labour Party.

It cannot be democratic for 270 M.P.s to have one third of the votes in the Electoral College in the election of Leader and Deputy Leader of the Party whilst 5 million affiliated trade unionists are only afforded the same number of votes. It cannot be right for 260,000 individual members to only have the same number of votes in the Electoral College as 270 M.P.s! The sooner that O.M.O.V is scrapped and real democracy reintroduced into the Party the better for the Party and movement as a whole.

For far too long we have been dominated inside the Party by pessimists who see no hope in socialism or campaigning for the means of production, distribution and exchange to be taken into common ownership. These "new realists" do a dis-service to the Party, to the trade union movement and to their class. I don't want to see the Labour Party become an American Democratic Party, Mark II. All socialists have got to collectively campaign for policies which are in the interests of our class. These policies must include a demand that all industries which have been privatised in part or in whole - including coal, water, gas, electricity and railways are taken back into public ownership by the next Labour Government.

We should remind the Party that it has an ongoing obligation to repay the massive losses - including fines and legal fees - sustained by the NUM as a result of legal actions brought against us during the 1984/85 miners' strike. Above all the next Labour Government must reinstate those miners who were sacked in 1984/85 and repay to them all the wages they have lost!

New Realism or collaboration is a disease which retards the fight for a socialist alternative. Arthur Horner, one of my illustrious predecessors, put this in perspective when he said:

"To those familiar with the history of the Labour Movement, it is not strange that suggestions for industrial peace and closer co-operation with the employers should occupy the activities of the Trade Union bureaucrats in times of industrial defeat - industrial peace is the last straw of defeated, demoralised and in some cases treacherous men who have lost all hope in the future of their class."

He could have been talking about the TUC leadership over the past 10 years. Who would have believed that the TUC would be inviting a Tory Government Minister and Director General of the CBI to address a Conference on the 5th July? These are the people who have destroyed jobs, introduced anti-trade union laws and savaged our class. Our trade union movement should not be collaborating, but confronting our class enemies and using all our strength to defeat these forces of evil which have lost all right to govern this country. Our Movement is not extreme and in many ways can be considered too moderate in its demands.

I think it is appropriate to quote the words of the outstanding Irish socialist James Connolly whose views contrast so sharply with those who openly co-operate and collaborate with Tory Government Ministers and leaders of the British ruling class. Connolly said:

"Some men, faint hearted, ever seek
our programme to retouch,
And will insist, when'er they speak
That we demand too much,
Tis passing strange, yet I declare
Such statements give me mirth
For our demands most moderate are,

We only want the earth."

We must do all in our power to honour and match the commitment of those who built our movement, to honour our NUM colleagues particularly those who paid the ultimate price - and the magnificent Women Against Pit Closures who gave so much in 1984/85, throughout the decade and during the latest round of attacks in 1992 to 1994.

We must stop apologising and making excuses for our socialist faith. We have an obligation as socialists and trade unionists to continue to fight for a better world. We can best do this by turning the vision of James Connolly into the socialist reality that he so desperately wanted to see.