

Once again as we meet here in this magnificent debating chamber for our Biennial Conference it is in a time of crisis in our UK Coal Mining Industry.

The drop in the world market price for coal has been caused by a number of reasons – the United States of America using gas from fracking in power stations instead of coal has meant America selling coal cheaply on international markets.

The slowdown in the growth of countries like India, China and others has meant surplus of coal from exporting countries driving down the price of coal.

Russia who was supplying the UK with 44% of its coal imports was selling at a subsidised price level and it has had a disastrous effect on our coal industry.

The fact that coal is traded in dollars and the pound is at a very high exchange rate against the US Dollar.

All these factors have forced down the price paid for coal.

Since we last met we have lost 2 deep mines and a number of coalmining companies going into liquidation. Maltby Colliery was closed due to the replacement face which was being driven encountering a number of gas and water outbursts which led to the fact development being stopped due to the danger to miners working there.

The Union did all it could including commissioning an independent mining report into the likely cause of the outbursts. The report concluded that if the face was re-driven a considerable distance back out the drivages it would probably prevent further danger to the men working on the coalface. Because of the face gap and loss of coal to be produced the company would not agree to the proposal and sadly announced the closure of Maltby Colliery.

From the beginning of the outbursts occurring the NUM's position was that in no way would it support any actions that would place our members in danger and although we achieved better redundancy terms and potential transfers to other collieries nothing takes away the sad consequences of hundreds of job losses and a colliery being closed when it had a future.

We also saw the closure of Daw Mill Colliery, again a colliery with massive coal reserves and what should have been a long term future.

Although over the years we were denied the right to properly represent out members employed at Daw Mill because the former BCC and UK Coal would only deal with the UDM but as we got involved at the latter end it became clear that Daw Mill as a colliery had been badly managed for years in collusion with the UDM.

Daw Mill was probably rightly called “the jewel in the crown” because of its seam heights, conditions and reserves and it is tragic that bad management decisions over many years, like stopping developments, driving roadways and faces in wrong directions led to its premature demise. And although the ultimate closure was the result of an underground fire the damage was done long before.

As a Union we would not have allowed the mismanagement over the years to take place without the stiffest of opposition which in our view did not come from the complaint UDM.

The sad fact is that Daw Mill ended up financially ruining UK Coal and as we know the repercussions are still being suffered to the rest of the companies.

We now have UK Coal’s remaining 2 deep mines fighting for their very existence despite the fact that both Kellingley and Thoresby have coal reserves to last into the foreseeable future.

Back in March when another financial crisis hit UK Coal they told us closure of imminent unless financial aid was forthcoming within 48 hours and immediately the NUM got involved to try and secure a future for our members employed by UK Coal.

As talks continued it became evidence the plan put forward by the company to the Government supported by the PPF, Harworth Estates and Hargreaves was for a phased closure of both Kellingley and Thoresby over an 18-month period.

This gave the NUM a real problem as we clearly believed both collieries had a longer future, that is why although we realised we could not reject at that stage the only financial plan that at least gave us 18 months of colliery life our view continued to be that we fight for a longer term plan to give the collieries the opportunity to turn things around.

Because of our persistence it was eventually accepted by the Government that if other parties came forward with a longer term plan it would be allowed.

Most of you will know the proposed closure plan has now fallen because Hargreaves have withdrawn from their part of the deal. During the time from March to now this Union has been doing all in its power to bring forward a plan and convincing others that there is a case for a longer term future for both collieries.

The Union has organised along with the TUC:

- Meetings with the Energy Minister Michael Fallon and DECC Officials;
- Meetings and briefings on a regular basis with MP's and Shadow Ministers and I should place on record our thanks to Ian Lavery, David Hamilton, Dennis Skinner and Alan Meale who have been to the fore in assisting the Union to put forward the case for a longer term future for Kellingley and Thoresby;
- We have been to European Parliament to meet the Commissioners to clarify how State Aid would work as opposed to what we were told by DECC Officials that State Aid was not available;
- We commissioned a report from Orion which proves the case that the State Aid option our Union has been arguing for is a better financial option for the British tax payer than the closure programme that was put forward.

If the State Aid option was taken up it would give the collieries more time to develop new coal faces and get back into profit with the possibility of starting to pay back the State Aid before 2018 therefore extending the life of the two collieries beyond 2018. Even if that was not possible the Orion report proves that it would save the Government money by keeping employment in the mines until 2018 and having people contributing to the exchequer rather than taking benefit.

We should also pay tribute to the miners at both collieries who despite the threat of closure hanging over them have proven that given the opportunity and conditions they can produce the coal needed to sustain a long term future for the collieries and the leadership given by our local Officials has been crucial in achieving this.

At Thoresby it was a plan put forward by the NUM to move to a four shift pattern which was opposed by the UDM but accepted by management that has retained more of the workforce and increased production.

At Kellingley the local Officials achieved a re-training programme to replace contractors with company employees and they have been

leading an investigation into the possibility of an employee buy-out if it is possible, proving the commitment and determination of their workforce to keep their pit open to the outside world.

Because of Hargreaves withdrawing their support for the closure plan our Union has again asked for UK Coal to produce a 4-year plan for both collieries in order to make a claim for State Aid to extend the collieries life to 2018.

We have also been involved in the setting up of the EBT at Hatfield along with the Union's local Officials.

Conference should not forget the determination and persistence that it took by the Hatfield Branch to re-establish and succeed in getting recognition for the NUM at the Colliery despite the strong management and company opposition.

This was crucial in allowing the Union to play its part in trying to secure the long term future for Hatfield through the EBT but as with the other UK Coal companies for all the reasons I have stated price of coal, exchange rates etc Hatfield's future is in danger just like UK Coal pits, Welsh pits and Scottish surface mines.

For this reason the Union has had meetings with company directors, politicians to include Hatfield in a bid for State Aid to Europe and also to commission an Orion Report for Hatfield, similar to the one for UK Coal collieries to prove that it is better financially for the British tax payer for the pit to be given assistance to stay open through State Aid rather than closure.

As usual our coal industry is being left out on a limb to wither away by successive governments. By my reckoning the last time we were given government aid was approximately 10 to 12 years ago and compare this to the aid given to nuclear, renewables and other energy users in comparison. We have never been allowed to operate on a level playing field.

We still have on average 40% of our electricity in this country produced from coal fired power stations burning 60 million tonnes of coal.

It is obscene that over 60% of that coal is imported and recent figures show that 44% of those imports came from Russia which shows that despite Cameron and Hague's strong talk about sanctions against Russia because of what is happening in Ukraine it is only weasel words

as they would apparently protect Russian jobs as opposed to keeping British miners in work.

What has happened to the importance of security of supply with regard to coal, we are leaving this country wide open to being forced to pay whatever others dictate to meet our coal usage.

Where is the debate over the effect on our balance of payments of the years of massive coal imports which could have been produced in this country employing people in decently paid jobs.

This is why the NUM is justified in arguing so strongly to maintain and expand our indigenous coal industry, not because of some emotional argument but because to meet our country's energy needs coal will be a major payer for years to come.

Still staying with our industry the Union has been involved with the HSE Mines Inspectorate in a consultation over the proposed changes to mining legislation.

Let me make it perfectly clear to conference the NEC Sub-Committee dealing with this matter have made it abundantly clear to HSE we will oppose any attempt to water down the mining legislation to the detriment of the people working in our industry.

Our view is clear much of that legislation came about because of the terrible price miners had to pay through disasters, loss of life and injuries.

In our discussions to date we differ categorically on a number of issues – future Mines Rescue, 123 Inspections, Qualifications, Responsibilities and many other proposed changes.

But let me give Conference this pledge, the Sub-Committee on behalf of the NEC will stand their ground and continue to oppose these changes which in our opinion weakens mining safety legislation.

We also jointly organised a conference on carbon capture and storage with Unite the union earlier this year at Wortley Hall which was a good success.

The two Unions have now set up a website and agreed to lobby politicians and seek the support of other unions involved in the energy and industrial sectors for their support to push the case for more government support over and above the two projects announced – the

White Rose Project in Yorkshire and the Gas Station at Peterhead in Scotland.

The technology of removing CO₂ from emissions has been proven in a number of pilot schemes and it is imperative CCS is introduced on an industrial scale to allow Britain to meet its environmental commitments.

The Union has a tremendous record of representing our membership both in relation to industry matters and in areas of industrial diseases, pensions, welfare rights etc.

But this leadership has in the past come from the Areas in the main and this must be addressed so that in the future the National Union supports more of the essential work and support given by our Areas by ensuring that every Area of this Union is kept up to date with what is happening in all parts of the Union, with regard to MAT's, Industrial Injury Claims, Concessionary Fuel and Pension problems.

The National Union would then play a pivotal role in ensuring that the communication links are in place that would give our working and retired members the best possible service and assistance through an enhanced knowledge base.

This is also the 30th Anniversary of the 1984/85 Miners Strike – one of the most historic class struggles of all times.

I will be addressing this in more detail tomorrow when I take part in the anniversary rally. Over the years we have seen many opinions and versions given about the dispute some in my opinion re-writing history.

My belief has never wavered that the strike was right back then because of the known fact that our industry, our jobs, our communities were going to be decimated by the then Tory government.

It did not happen as some suggest because someone snapped their fingers and everyone followed.

Remember the list of colliery closures that was announced in the early 1980's then withdrawn when there was spontaneous walkouts across much of the coalfield.

Remember the fact that we had already had pit closures in Kent, South Wales, North West, North East and Scotland and the Coal Board plan that would close the peripheral coalfields and concentrate production in the central coalfields.

The miners knew what was coming and that was why the majority of our members joined the action without a ballot which in my opinion we may well have lost but a ballot would have allowed miners who believed the Coal Board propaganda that they were safe to vote other miners out of a job,

If anyone saw the two recent documentaries made in Wales and Yorkshire about the strike in which Heseltine unequivocally state the government manipulated the strike to destroy the power of the trade unions by defeating the NUM who were seen as the vanguard of the movement. It disproved forever the notion that the NUM was politically motivated to take on the government of the day, remember the Ridley plan outlining the tactics to be used in order to achieve this.

That is why I was proud to be part of that historic struggle that was the right action to take to defend our industry, our jobs, our communities and I would do the same again.

People question why we are still raising issues that happened 30 years ago.

By my opinion is quite clear we have duty to prove the lies that were told by the then government, the injustice that happened to hundreds of sacked miners, the thousands of miners arrested, the misuse of police powers and judiciary to inflict severe sentences and restrictions on miners means we have unfinished business.

That is why the Union has commissioned a detailed scrutiny of all papers now in the public domain to give evidence to Labour MP's to achieve a debate in Parliament to hopefully prove Parliament and the country was misled.

We should also never forget the tremendous support we received from the public both here and internationally and other trade unions and organisations to sustain our families during that year.

And never forget the role our women placed in a leading way to strengthen the miners resolve and support our families to maintain the fight during that year long struggle. As the alternative was to meekly accept the bit by bit closure programme to decimate our industry, jobs and communities. The decision to right this was right then and remains right today.

I think we can be proud of what the Union has done since our last Conference. Despite criticism and personal attacks by a small group of individuals who have formed a protection society for a former President of this Union who once spoke on this rostrum against anti-trade union legislation but who now uses it through others to attack this Union.

Our General Secretary has turned the Union's finances around by doing sensible things that should have been done years ago.

We no longer have a mausoleum of an empty former HQ in Sheffield costing this Union money, instead it is now earning money and similarly the empty properties instead of draining resources are bringing in rent money – that is why through all these actions I have related to we can show despite the concentrated personal attacks that we have not been deflected from what a Union should do by striving to do to the best of our ability to represent our members interests unlike others and that is why I am so proud to be President of this Great Union.