

PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS

Conference, to stand before you today as President of the National Union of Teachers is a great honour. And Cardiff - where I spent much of my youth and went to University. - is the best setting I can imagine to set out my perspective on the Union's future and my vision for education.

For the Welsh, education has been a powerful and inspiring force, seen always as creative, progressive and, above all, liberating. From education we draw life and hope.

I grew up just a few miles away in the seaside town of Porthcawl. I attended New Road Primary and Porthcawl Comprehensive Schools, schools which shaped my life and built my confidence. They gave me a desire to explore ideas and a love of learning as a means of changing society with all its injustices and all its inequalities.

They inspired my ambition to be a teacher like my primary school teacher, Mrs Thomas. She lives on in the memory, not by statue or glowing popular biography but by the dedication and enthusiasm she generated in helping me to succeed.

I will never forget her. She was an exceptional teacher. She fostered in me a love of words, of language and the beauty of writing. Many figures in history have influenced my life but she will always be part of my educational soul. Mrs Thomas and many other of my teachers were educational liberators then, as their successors are now.

The belief in education was strong in my family. In the 1930s, at the age of 13, my father started work underground as a miner in a pit near Pontypool. One of six sons, he can still tell you, at age 90, of his family's struggle for survival during the great depression. His mother didn't know from where the next meal would come from. He and his brothers scavenged for coal in the waste tips. His formal educational opportunities were therefore brief.

My parents were married shortly after 1945. My mother also had a limited access to learning. They witnessed poverty; unemployment; and social despair. Theirs was a society in which educational opportunity was scarce and where infant mortality, chronic

ill health, malnutrition and poor housing were endemic.

In their eyes, the escape route from the travails of life in South Wales lay in the inherent power of education. Only education would provide a chance to compete in a world built upon inequality and social hierarchy. Only education would provide their children with an alternative to the pit or the steelworks.

For my parents, the day that I graduated from University was the realisation of their determination to give me a life chance. I will forever be proud of them and their profoundly proud of their belief in education.

Conference, in 2008 we lost another powerful advocate of a properly funded and resourced state education system, our General Secretary, Steve Sinnott. This was devastating for his wife Mary, his children Stephen and Kate, and indeed to all of us. Steve was respected across the world. He was at the centre of the international struggles to provide education for all and to achieve the Millennium Goals.

Steve was a doughty campaigner for human rights and trade unionism. He set us a proud example. No history of our Union would be complete without a tribute to the boundless energy of a man who, at every turn, would challenge inequality, injustice and poverty.

Steve's Liverpool background underpinned his association with the Union's traditional support for children from the most deprived social backgrounds. He understood the need for every child to have a life chance. He recognised the importance of a good local school for every child and for every community.

Last year, when we celebrated his life at the Queen Elizabeth Centre, we left knowing how a person can live a dream and make a difference. Steve gave his everything to the Union. He valued everyone as an individual. He was totally committed to the pursuit of unity within the Union and across the profession. As your President I pledge to work towards those same objectives.

Steve died at the start of a crucial campaign to defend the living standards of teachers. When Christine Blower became Acting General Secretary, she spoke with the strength

and the clarity so urgently needed. She took on the leadership with the greatest distinction. On the 24th April when our members so magnificently supported our call for action she led from the front with courage. Christine, we thank you for your leadership and we thank you for your strength.

Conference, the collapse of Merrill Lynch towards the end of 2008 signalled the beginning of systemic failure within the international banking system. The impact of the global economic recession deepened and intensified during the early months of 2009. The collapse of the financial system led to billions of tax payers' money being committed to supporting our own banking institutions.

In that same period, the Government, a Labour Government, continued to promote the culture of the market in education. I say to you, what irony that the collapse of the financial market led the same government to nationalise the banks. Now, with the bubble burst, we face the awesome reality of soaring unemployment, loss of homes, further erosion of our industrial base and a falling GDP. We face the prospect worldwide of 200 million workers plunged into extreme poverty.

To rescue banks, the Government invested astronomical amounts of money, building a massive national debt and leading inevitably to increases in taxation and the spectre of swingeing cuts in public spending. This crisis may not be of our making but its consequences will have a profound impact on public services in general and, in particular, for schools, teachers and children.

This Union cares profoundly about the soul of our society. If public investment is acceptable to our banks, it is most certainly acceptable to our schools. Deregulation ruined our banking system; **we must not let it ruin our education system.**

Our Union remains *the* powerful force needed for the **protection and** promotion of progressive education for all children, regardless of social class, race or background. But if we are to make positive change in the future, now is the time to engage all those who view with growing despair and disgust the creed of greed which suffocates the equality of opportunity that we champion.

Much has changed in the last 12 months. Many have seen the need to re-evaluate

simplistic, shallow and common concepts of narrow individualism. Society is not abstract: it is the:

- children, their parents and the communities in which we work; and
- the colleagues with whom we share our professional responsibilities.

To us, to you, as trade unionists, these are material and tangible constructs - we have responsibilities towards each other. The hedonistic pursuit of pure self interest is irreconcilable with the simple ideals we all share, such as professional care, the understanding that teachers can change children's lives or merely the confidence which we can impart to our pupils. We reject the arrogant, discredited philosophy that there is no such thing as society.

To liberate the young, our schools need resources. So what then is the outlook for the funding of education in England and Wales over the next few years? Even before we experienced the trauma of financial turbulence and banking collapse, we knew that it would be tough.

Annual increases in the Minimum Funding Guarantee for the current three year funding period are less than the Government's own assessment of the pressures on schools' average costs. This settlement is already causing difficulties as schools struggle to keep pace.

My local authority, the East Riding of Yorkshire, has received a Dedicated School Budget of an estimated £175.4 million. On the surface, that represents a £3.4 million cash increase or 2 per cent growth, but look below the headline figure, however, and we see budget pressures of over £8 million and reductions in overall spending of over £4.5 million.

These are real cuts now: real threats to teachers' jobs and the quality of local education provision. The reductions are mirrored in overall public spending plans up to 2014. This will be replicated across England and the problems in Wales will be exacerbated, with children here in Wales receiving, per pupil, £496 less than those in England.

In January 2009, the House of Commons Education Select Committee warned that this year we would see only minimal growth in education spending. This will pose immediate challenges to our Union. We must be ready to defend jobs and state education against the cuts that will undoubtedly be promoted.

And such is the cost of the rescue of the financial services sector that, whichever party forms the next government, there will be enormous pressure on our public sector. Pensions and pay will both be under threat. No one in this hall should assume that the teachers' pension scheme is safe. There are already the usual clarion voices for pensions in the public sector to be reviewed. We could face moves to increase the teachers' contribution or reduction in benefits. We might even face cuts in pay in absolute terms, not just real terms.

We must be prepared and ready to defend our pay and our pensions. We must be prepared to defend every school and every teacher. If Gordon Brown can find the money to support financially struggling private schools with taxpayers' money, he can certainly support state schools.

Colleagues, our Conference slogan is "Promoting Teacher Unity and State Education". The two concepts are inextricably linked. Only with a united and independent teaching profession can we defend publicly provided, high quality education.

Outside this hall, not too far from here, and distant from the educational world, there are those who want to set back the clock. They want accelerated privatisation. They want deregulation of teachers' pay and working conditions. They want the further atomization of school structures. Some even hope that every school will be an Academy.

These are the reactionary ideologues who threaten our members. These are the public school educated politicians; right-wing think-tank policy figures; and the free-market philosophers. If placed in positions of political influence, I doubt that they would want to wish to collaborate with trade unions because such an approach would be inimical to their ideological psychology. I don't see them entertaining social partnerships.

This year we face the gravest recession since the 1980s and, sadly, the prospect of a return to thinly veiled and disguised Thatcherism. Within 18 months we could have a change of government. Mr Cameron's so-called "vision for the future" for education, with its thousands of independent comprehensive schools – itself, colleagues, a contradiction in terms - will take us back to the middle ages, and certainly not into a "New Age".

But why does the Conservative Party seem always ready to revert to type? The formula is wearily familiar:

- ignore the evidence of what works;
- deride school achievement but say you support teachers;
- praise the professional judgement of teachers on the one hand but insist on the teaching of synthetic phonics on the other; and
- say that you support education as a top priority – yes, even as Michael Gove recently said, "as a motor for a 21st Century knowledge economy"; and then
- trail massive cuts in education spending.

I say this because according to the opinion polls, we are likely to have a Conservative Government next year.

And let's be clear. It's going to take all our strength - teachers, parents, government, governors, all those interested in education and all those committed to equality of opportunity – to prevent the dismantling of our publicly funded education system. We must not allow the systematic deregulation of education or the dismantling of our schools' system. We must create a broad alliance that reaches out to parents; an alliance that involves the wider trade union movement, pro-comprehensive pressure groups and - yes - our colleagues in the other teachers' organisations.

Unity with the other teachers' organisations in these circumstances is not a luxury. It's not even an abstract moral ideal. It is an imperative. We need unity to:

- promote our vision of local families of schools;
- to stop the direction of travel towards privatisation of all our schools and services; and
- to respond if, in 2010, our education service steps into the unknown.

The case for teacher unity has been made repeatedly at our conferences. It has never been more needed. It would signal the birth of a powerful force to speak up for teachers and to speak up for state education. Yes - it would require compromise and even sacrifice - but the rewards would be rich and the gains immeasurable.

So, once more, we extend the hand of unity. But if we are to create the possibility of a single teachers' organisation we must strive more than ever to recruit and build our membership. That's part of the jigsaw of change.

This Union represents teachers at all levels and in all types of school. That diversity makes us strong. It makes us confident; a union which teachers join because they see us as representing and speaking for the profession. In making recruitment a key component of our culture, we move back not one step from our goal of professional unity.

Conference, despite the economic gloom surrounding us, this year's spring term has been one of hope – hope for teachers' professional unity – for professional unity in action.

The joint conference organised between ourselves and the National Association of Head Teachers was unity in action; a powerful and dynamic example of professionals working together to achieve a common goal - the elimination of 'top down', imposed, unloved, unwanted, unnecessary and unreliable tests that have done so much to damage our children's learning and indeed to damage learning itself.

Think of the prize when we win our campaign, because we will.

In primary schools, teachers and leaders will, at long last, have received the message that they are trusted to do the job. **Sarah, a parent, yesterday, sent an email to my local radio station, Radio Humberside. She said:**

“My 10 year old son is due to take his SATs tests in May this year. He has a Beano calendar in his bedroom and recently he turned over the page for April.

“As he was doing this he said to me ‘Mummy, I don't want to turn the next page for May when it comes because that's when we have the SATs’.

“I reassured him at the time, but then left the room and cried in the bathroom. I am so anxious for my son, he is very, very worried and almost terrified of the forthcoming tests - it's all he is thinking about.

“Shame on the Government for making my little boy, only 10 years of age come under so much pressure.”

Sarah, we agree with you and the National Union of Teachers is with you.

This campaign is about more than raising the morale and motivation of teachers. Remember the powerful evidence gathered by the research we commissioned from Cambridge University and launched in Parliament last December. It said:

“What motivates teachers to remain within the profession and to give of their best is the buzz of ‘a magic moment’; when the ‘penny finally drops’; when the pupil's puzzled gaze gives way to a smile of recognition. It is in these ‘magic moments’ that teaching meets learning. When that meeting of minds becomes an expectation, rather than a rare occurrence. Teaching reaps its own rewards and learning is no longer

the servant of token incentives.”¹

Conference, our joint campaign with the NAHT is about restoring magic moments to the primary classroom, as everyday events not as rarities.

Conference, let me tell you this. I shall be proud as President, alongside our colleagues in the NAHT, to help lead the campaign to get rid of - at long last - imposed, nationally prescribed testing. Conference, the Government - whichever Government it is in 2010 - will have to understand one obvious fact: because of our boycott carried out with the NAHT there will be no National Curriculum testing forced on our schools; not in 2010 nor indeed in any year after that.

And I call on our colleagues in the other teachers' organisations and the TUC, to join our united campaign. What a boost that would give not only to professional unity but to the teaching profession as a whole.

Conference, there would be no better message to give to the political parties in the run up to the next general election than that our profession is strong, confident and prepared to stand up for all that is best in education, whatever government is elected.

Do you know what? Our state school system is a wonderful asset. So why oh why is there an obsession with talking it down? Why do we have the unbalanced reporting about state schools? The criticism of state schools is like a strange virus, and this virus seems to infect the intellectual educational establishment: journalists, academics, even Chief School Inspectors and indeed Government Ministers – all are victims of this strange and puzzling disorder.

Results have never been higher. Teachers, as you know, meet never-ending demands with year-on-year success. Yet from all sides, teachers are attacked and their work denigrated. For the last 20 years teachers have been cajoled, imposed upon, harangued and, it seems, praised only when politically convenient.

The basic premise underlying all of this Government's reforms seems to be that unless teachers' noses are kept to the grindstone, then they will revert to complacency, with

¹ *Teachers Under Pressure*, Maurice Galton and John MacBeath, Sage/NUT, 2008.

redemption only through the application of big sticks and small carrots. Are they not blind to the reality that for thousands of children, schools are safe havens, places of security and sanity in disturbed communities?

What neither the Government nor the Tories seem to understand is the absolutely obvious - you can't get anyone to do anything properly if you do not trust them!

I say to you that the teaching profession is long overdue for a new deal based on trust. Professional development, including sabbaticals and funding, should be an entitlement for every teacher. Class sizes should meet pupils' needs. School evaluation systems should be based on support and not upon punishment.

Chief Inspector of Schools, Christine Gilbert, says teachers are boring. The General Teaching Council in England says that teachers need a code of conduct to tell them how to behave even when they are off duty. The Training and Development Agency for Schools draws up ever longer lists of professional competencies for trainee teachers. The Government says that not enough teachers are disciplined for incompetence. The newspapers, the media, are consistent in their denigration of teachers.

Is it not surprising that so many teachers leave the profession within the first three years of their work? Is it no longer possible to talk with pride about the achievements of our teachers, our schools and children? Can they not find the moral and intellectual integrity to recognise the fact that actually, our state education system is as intrinsically wonderful as the National Health Service, available to all, regardless of wealth or social status?

If they don't have the honesty to speak for our schools, then we must and we will. Our pride is in the professionalism of our members and of qualified teachers. Our pride is in their ceaseless dedication and ambition for the children in their care. It is in the job they do, day in, day out, with no media fanfare and with no fuss. It is because they care and endure so much of this shabby criticism that the National Union of Teachers will always speak in their defence.

Teachers need something different. They need their voices heard. We need a self-

confident profession; sure that it has the trust of Government.

The prize is there for this or any future government: to raise the status of the teaching profession and to get rid of tests, targets, tables, OFSTED inspections, performance management and all the other oppressive machinery of distrust built up over the last 20 years.

You and I have faith in those teachers. We have faith in those schools. Today, the Union celebrates their successes and we celebrate the achievements of their pupils.

As Senior Vice-President, I visited many schools and teachers in England and Wales. I'd like to tell you about at least some of them. I'd like to write some alternative headlines about the astonishing successes of community schools. Schools like Hilltop Special School in Gateshead, a school working with children with learning and physical disabilities.

I tell you today, these children have the support of inspired teachers who meet their complex needs and give them happy childhoods; teachers who understand their communities and contribute enormously to their well being. Their worth is not measured by calculators - with financial return per hour - but rather by dedication, by care and by trust.

These are the people who our media should talk about. And if they don't, then you and I must do so instead. I was moved by the warmth of spirit of those teachers, some of whom are in this hall today. They are the real soul of our Union. They are without doubt and with pride the professionals we salute today.

Colleagues, we live in an era of imposition, of assessment and control; an era in which the professional skills of teachers have been denigrated and discounted. It is the age of clip board supervisors, wandering – in many cases aimlessly – school corridors and ticking boxes on teacher performance – an activity devoid of meaning and frankly wasteful of time. It is an age of pseudo accountability in which the teacher is a pawn in a marketised construct that speaks in the crudest terms about targets for schools and targets for teachers.

The growth of filing cabinets in school offices, packed with year on year performance management planning for staff, is an industry in itself, and to what effect?

Or, alternatively, ask the 30,000 teachers who were robbed of their management allowance payments at the beginning of 2009! Ask them if they feel liberated by the end of salary safeguarding!

Ask the primary teachers if they are overjoyed with the prospect of carrying out even more responsibility than ever before, without any salary recognition at all!

Maybe we need to speak to the thousands of teachers who are turned down in threshold or upper pay scale progression, often by the flimsiest of criteria.

Conference, we say today that this is a disgrace. The NUT rejects the heads-you-win, tails-you-lose approach to rewarding teachers. That's why we stood up for the profession on 24 April of last year. The Union stood up for the young teachers struggling to pay their rent or simply pay their college loans. We spoke up for all teachers and the legitimate defence of their living standards.

This year, we must intensify our efforts to restore proper recognition of and respect for the professionalism of teachers. We must work with even greater determination to challenge the culture of imposition. That culture has created a lost generation of teachers who have:

- left the profession early in their careers;
- suffered mental ill health brought on by the relentless demands of the system; and
- teachers who are victims of bullying and the constant stress of intrusive de-professionalising regimes.

These are the lost generations of teachers; dedicated and in many cases, experienced teachers, driven from their profession by unrealistic objectives and imposed top-down target setting and observation.

Colleagues, don't accept the deceit that this is how it has to be. Don't listen to the spin that teachers can cope, they will be fine, they may just even thrive under this relentless downward pressure of accountability and control. Tell that to the teachers who haven't even the strength left to attend their own leaving functions at school because their health has been so badly damaged by their work culture.

The human tragedy – and that's what it is – of a disposable profession has to be challenged at the point of origin - intolerable work-load demands; punitive classroom observation protocols; endless and mindless bureaucratic target setting; mechanical lesson planning; pro-formas; and an inspection system, which leaves teachers anxious, stressed and frankly bewildered.

We say enough is enough. We must commit ourselves to combating that inequity. We owe it to those who have left our profession. We owe it more to those who remain. We also owe it to the students, the teachers of the future.

This is a strong union based upon principles that bind us together. We share values that we hold dear. In an age of disposability and when disposability has been commonplace, our principles have remained resolute. At a time when political parties have rewritten their social and political values - in some cases, on a week to week basis - we have maintained our trust in equality and the pursuit of progress for all. Our commitment to equal opportunities is at the centre of our history.

History has shaped and moulded the educational soul of your and my Union. We remain committed to the principle that our children are entitled to be taught by those who are properly and professionally trained to teach. This aim was enshrined in the very earliest constitutions of the Union. We remain unrepentant in our desire. It has always been at the very heart of what we have fought for. It is borne out by the findings of international research.

The struggle for a properly qualified teaching profession is about safeguarding the education of children. It cannot be achieved without properly paid, qualified and trained teachers whose status stands alongside comparable professions. It is about fundamental trade union principles and ensuring the highest level of educational

opportunity for the children in our care.

We will remain firm and committed to an ideal that is part of our heart and soul as a Union. I believe it makes us proud to be part of this Union. The belief that every child deserves a qualified teacher is shared with other teacher organisations worldwide.

Conference, our education system doesn't exist in isolation or a vacuum. It's not immune from the changing priorities and ambitions of national governments. The international trade union movement is able to chart the interrelationship and continuity of educational policy development between different sovereign states. Unfortunately, the influence of the World Bank is far reaching. We should not be surprised then to find projects such as Academies in other parts of the world.

I believe... you believe that education is a prerequisite for human dignity, freedom and solidarity world-wide. It is a concept without boundary... a concept without border. It has the capacity to change lives, challenge poverty, bigotry, racism and discrimination. It provides the engine for creating a society based upon tolerance, equal opportunity, the championing of diversity, the promotion of human rights and the dignity of the individual.

Humanity is global. Children are not an international currency but an international force. Education should not be a product that we measure in terms of exchange value or commodity pricing.

For us, education and the opportunities it brings children are incredibly simple. We view state education not as a commodity to be bought, sold or traded, but rather as the international language of liberation and hope. Liberation from the kind of impoverishment that shapes the lives of so many children in what is termed 'the developing world'.

As Chair of the International Sub-Committee of our Union, I have witnessed the work that we have done to foster, in alliance with others, the agenda of ending the desperation of so many of the world's children. Our – your - collective voice as a Union has helped promote that international agenda. Our work goes on. With seventy-five million children still receiving no formal education worldwide, we still have much to do.

Conference, the watchword of this government – and you've heard it before - is 'modernising'. Politicians and newspaper editors have criticised us for failing to move with the times and embrace the brave new world of Academies and Trusts. Our refusal to concede the employment of unqualified staff as teachers is another example of our inertia.

The reality is that the so-called modernisation of education is somewhat different. It is intended to:

- segregate and divide our schools from each other;
- establish competition between our schools as the *modus operandi* of a funding system;
- end national pay and conditions of service arrangements;
- consolidate flexible models of operation, in which, no doubt, teachers' salaries will be contained or reduced;
- increase the potential for selection; and
- eliminate local accountability to communities and parents.

For the modernisers, 'modernisation' means selling off our schools and handing over the control of governing bodies to faceless corporate entities that understand little of the community, little of the people, little of the social and economic environment, or indeed – heaven forbid - the children themselves.

The outcome of such modernisation will mean the loss of coherent national educational planning coupled with vibrant local authorities co-ordinating and co-operating in the provision of a high level of public service at community level. It will be a return to the voluntarism of the Victorian era.

The word 'modernisation' is used to disguise real intent. It is remote from the

progressive alternatives that we advance. We believe that every child and every community has the right to and not the privilege of a good local school. We propose a funding system that meets the need of every child, both in urban and rural communities, with the resources to meet their potential. Our expectation is a first rate education service, meeting the needs of all children and confident as a facilitator of progress. We understand the need to modernise, but our concept of modernisation implies, by definition, investment and an end to the fragmentation of our education services.

Our vision of the future is a national education service - funded by taxation - and locally accountable to parents and children by virtue of coherent, transparent and democratic public control. It is an education service with, at its heart, schools that are not subject to the vagaries of the market with all the attendant risks and insecurities. And our vision for the NUT in the 21st Century is a modern union working in partnership with government that trusts teachers' professionalism but places no limitations upon dialogue.

We do not use the term 'modernisation' loosely. This union has a legacy of change and a history of progressive reform. Our Union will never abandon that commitment. For us, it is part of who we are.

Public sector education faces real challenges in the next few years. These challenges will require us to stand together as one; to be firm in our convictions and most of all to be sure in our resolve. Our Union, and you as our activists, remain a powerful force for what is just and for what is fair.

Colleagues, you are the people who understand at first hand what a good local school for every child means in your communities. You understand how local schools bring hope and bring opportunity, in many cases to children and families who face social and economic hardship. You know... we do share a common identity and a common DNA to create a society in which every child has the right to succeed.

The history of our Union shows that we can play a major part in promoting education for all, and not the few. In challenging those who dismiss education as a tool of social progress or who see it as commodity, for sale or for profit, we assert our vision for a

better world for the next generation and beyond. We are strong because our values and our ambitions are right; equality and a belief in the dynamic power of teachers to change for the better the lives of those in their care, regardless of social status. We are a diverse union, with a wide array of opinions. That is what makes us outward looking and confident.

I believe that when we leave this conference, we'll do so with an even greater sense of purpose for the fight we have ahead. Education and the rights of our children are truly marvellous principles for which we should struggle. Through knowing our history, we better understand the strategic aims. We are and remain proud of our schools and their teachers.

Our message is clear. The National Union of Teachers is open for business. We are united, we are – every one of us - determined to succeed. We are ready to meet the challenges of the future without hesitation. We are ready to fulfil our obligations, as we have since we were founded in 1870. Be in no doubt, we remain the greatest advocates for progress.

Mary Macarthur, founder of the National Federation of Women Workers, and Leader of the Women's Chain Makers' strike in 1910, said "there is nothing in the world like believing in a cause and fighting for it." That's how I feel about being your President. At the outset I said that this is a great honour to hold this Office. The defence of the state education service in England and Wales is no mean task. Being President of this great Union is a major and rewarding responsibility. I look forward to these challenges - but most of all I look forward to working with the staff of the Union and with the local officers who make this Union what it is... a teachers' organisation of world class.

Colleagues, to those outside this hall we say, every one of us, we stand together as one Union - a great Union - our Union - the National Union of Teachers.