

Greaves

This is not your subject. Why go on with it - the press will crucify you for this.

Too defensive -  
If you can only be defensive - leave it alone.

What is "union-bashing"?

And have I been guilty of this grave offence? - No. Why put it into people's minds.

They are questions worth asking, while the reaction to my recent "outburst" is still fresh in people's minds.

The trade unions, as Mrs. Thatcher said on Monday, "are not monolithic armies". They are institutions which are supported by, and intended to represent, millions of individual working people.

And, as I emphasised last week, free trade unions are central to our Conservative idea of a free society.

Put out something to press

Judge Jones - public expenditure - in respect of the ...  
the 70-day release.

and.

This is no empty formula. If trade unions did not exist, it would be necessary to invent them. How else to represent the individual and group interests of those who earn their living in the corporate world of an industrial society?

But, like every other human institution, trade unions, and those who lead and often control them, can sometimes fall short of perfection.

In such circumstances, every other institution - from the MCC to the Church of England, from the House of Lords to the RSPCA - is rightly exposed to public debate and criticism. And so, of course, are trade unions and union leaders. Indeed, from the public bar to the directors' lunch-table, they are probably more discussed than any other institution.

Should not  
we thus work -  
it is too close to  
corporatism - reason  
there is no reason  
whatever why  
should not be a  
'works council'  
perhaps like  
John Lewis

So why should it be offensive for the very issues that are so widely discussed to be debated in public by a Member of the Opposition Front Bench? I have not "attacked" the trade unions, still less their individual membership. On the contrary, indeed. But I have asked some questions on subjects about which a majority of union members (still more the general public) are very clearly concerned: questions about the political power of trade union leaders, as it is exercised through the Labour Party; questions about the effect of trade union power on the freedom of individual work-people; and questions about the impact of trade union attitudes upon our economic performance.

*All sections are*

*You have  
already said this*

These questions are central to the political debate in this country. They do not involve "bashing" the unions, or anyone else. And it would be disastrous for the future of our free society if discussion of these issues was somehow to be placed "out of bounds" for fear of evoking a chorus of cries about "union bashing".

Union leaders have not been reluctant to criticise institutions (like the House of Lords, for example) in terms that are often less than respectful. They cannot expect to be able to dismiss political discussion of their own position as though it was something akin to blasphemy.

So let me pose again the most important points in the debate.

First, the constitutional position. It is beyond doubt that union leaders exercise great power throughout the institutions and the policy-making process of the Labour Party. It is equally clear that that power has been deployed in recent years to commit the Labour Party to policies which have hugely extended, and will continue to extend, the power of the trade union leadership in many aspects of our society. It is also plain that many (though not of course all) of the most powerful trade union leaders have used that power to carry forward Socialism in a most explicit fashion.

*It would be better  
if Jim  
said these things.*

It is also clear that a significant part of this power of union leadership is derived from the near-permanence with which many of them retain their positions, - in the Labour Party hierarchy as well as in their own unions. Three or four Prime Ministers are quite likely to come and go during the time when any given union leader retains a dominant position on the public stage.

In drawing attention to those facts, I do not seek to propose any change in the law. But I do argue, very strongly, that the electorate, union members and Labour Party members alike, should be clearly aware of the position - and should take account of it when deciding whether and how to cast their votes.

*You could see this  
argument every election  
or be urged  
Party just*

If electors wish to check the political thrust of key trade union leaders towards Socialism, then they can and should decline to re-elect a Labour Government.

If union members wish to change the direction in which their leaders exercise their power, then they should follow Jim Prior's advice to work and vote to that end within their own trade unions. This is the importance of the growing strength of Conservative trade unionists at every level.

And if Labour Party members wish to reduce the dominance of Left-inclined union leadership within their own Party, then let them argue that case as well as they are able. If they become convinced that the argument cannot be won in present circumstances, then let them follow Reg Prentice's example and work for the return of a Conservative Government so that the Labour Party can contemplate the wisdom of reforming its own structure in the tranquillity of Opposition.

I repeat: none of these arguments involve any proposals by me or the Conservative Party for any change in the law. They do suggest very clear conclusions for the electorate as to the way in which they should exercise their democratic rights. And it is of the first importance that these arguments should be plainly put.

As to the factors they should take into account in exercising.

My second point concerns the power of trade unions in relation to individual work-people: more simply, the grave threat to individual freedom that is posed by the spreading imposition of the unregulated closed shop. This too is an an issue which has to be thrashed out in public debate.



As Conservative leaders, including myself, have made clear repeatedly, there will be no attempt by a future Conservative Government at a sudden overhaul of industrial relations law, no attempt to impose magic solutions from above. But legislation which provides all the privileges for one side and places all the obligations on the other cannot be generally acceptable and will not be permanent.

In this spirit, we have identified one area of existing law and practice where the case for change is overwhelming - and that is, of course, the closed shop.

By a majority of five to one, the general public agree that the closed shop is a threat to individual liberty; and two out of three union members take the same view.

What change.

When if the case for change is overwhelming and the public is behind us - why don't we do it?

For this reason many people believe we should proceed to outlaw or ban the closed shop by law. Together with my colleagues, I do not believe that that would be the right way in which to proceed.

*Think you don't say why?*

If we are to secure changes in this emotionally charged area, then it is sensible to proceed step by step in the right direction, and to win the arguments as we go. "Some changes", again to quote the CBI, "may take longer to achieve than others". But at least when they are achieved, they will be likely to survive.

*why*

*but you have just said these are already won.*

So let me seek once again to advance the argument on this front, by posing again the questions that I posed a few months ago:

1. If a union seeks a closed shop, should it not first be able to show, by secret ballot, that it has the support of a majority of all the work-people who could be involved? Why do those who are elsewhere so ready to champion the cause of "industrial democracy" apparently reject the principle in relation to the closed shop? Why?
2. If a closed shop is acceptable to a majority of the work-people involved, why even then should workers already employed be required to conform - or lose their jobs? Why is "retrospective legislation" to be regarded as acceptable here - but nowhere else? And if they are to lose their jobs - a case which we find it difficult to accept - why should they not be compensated for that loss? Why?

*If 57% agree  
why should you  
& 90% be expelled?  
This would be retrograde.*

3. If a worker employed - or seeking to be employed - in a closed shop is expelled or excluded from his job by the decision of a union or a union branch, why should he not have the right to appeal to an independent legal tribunal against that decision? Why should "unfair dismissal" be challengeable in the Courts if the dismissal" be challengeable in the Courts if the dismissal was made by an employer, but not if the dismissal was effectively made by a union? Why?

Ha ha! } These questions do not involve any special criticism of trade unions. They stem from our knowledge of human nature itself. The real danger does not always or even often come from the union or its officers at national or regional level. It comes often at local level. It is there that clashes of personality and vested interests can create a situation of near tyranny.

If individual freedom means anything, then surely some effective safeguard must be provided in such cases? And the safeguard must not only be effective. It must be seen to be effective and wholly independent.

*But it is not,*

When I last posed these questions, Mr. Jack Jones alone was good enough to reply to one of my questions, by expressing his own view that the closed shop should apply "where a majority of workers wish it".

So far, so good. May we now hear whether this is the view of the trade union leadership as a whole? And may we now have answers to the questions which I have posed? Should it not be possible to arrive at agreed answers, which are in line with the standards of fairness and justice which Britons regard as automatic in other areas of our national life?

I pose these questions, I repeat, not in any spirit of hostility towards the trade unions. They have a duty to represent their members; and they are a very important interest group with whom any potential government needs to consult, if we are to repair and reform our battered collective bargaining machinery - particularly in the public sector.

I pose the questions simply on the basis that the Conservative Party, which is not subordinate to any interest group, seeks to represent the interests of the people as a whole. And the people are entitled to expect an answer to the questions which I have put.

I hope we shall not, by way of reply, hear any more of that catch-all word "confrontation" - to which Socialists, and some trade union leaders, are so ready to resort, when any Conservative endeavours to discuss issues of this kind. The word is not invoked in the course of discussion any other public issue of importance. When it is invoked, it can only serve to conjure up the threat of conflicts of a kind which we are certainly not in a position to provoke. Nor should we wish to do so.

So let this word (which serves so often to stifle discussion of important questions in this area) be firmly set to one side. And let us hear some answers to my questions instead.