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KJ seen

MEMO

TO : Sir Keith

FROM : Alfred Sherman

DATE : 14/9/77

This is a matter of vital importance, as you can see from the space devoted to it in the Times on the front page and the leader and the letter column, and the Daily Telegraph will be giving it a lot of space too. Therefore I should not worry about the length because what counts is length /importance ratio.

If you are worried about it I suggest you ring up the letters editor and simply say to him: "If you regard this as longer than it should be I implicitly trust you to shorten it."

Grunwick and the Scarman report

From the Leader of the Liberal Party

Sir, Sir Keith Joseph (September 12) in answer to my questions now goes beyond expressing a differing opinion on the rights and wrongs of the Grunwick dispute and perpetrates errors of fact.

First, I have never "defended union bullying" nor sought to suggest that "only the employer acted unreasonably". If he refers to *Hansard* he will find that I and my Liberal colleagues have condemned mass picketing and illegal union attempts to pressurize the company, and the Scarman report issued strictures on both activities (Para 62-64).

Second, he asserts that both I and the Scarman report "define as unreasonable a refusal to accept union dictation". This is totally untrue. This was not a dispute about a closed shop. As Scarman puts it: "The union was not looking for members; some Grunwick employees were looking for a union."

Grunwick has a long history of trying to ban union membership among its workers and a crucial passage in Para 40 of the Scarman report sums up the situation: "The company was perfectly entitled to prefer a policy of conducting its employee relations without the intrusion of trade unions in a collective bargaining role." (Sir Keith Joseph and I would both agree with this so far.) "But the maintenance of such a policy depends on industrial relations policies which in terms of pay and conditions, management attitudes, and the provision of an adequate alternative to collective bargaining machinery, do not cause employees a sense of deprivation or of grievance. We are satisfied that it was the company's failure to meet these exacting criteria which led to the dispute."

I agree with that, whereas Sir Keith Joseph and Mr John Gorst and the National Association for Freedom seem to think that an employer has no duty beyond that of remaining within the law. My original political point was that if this were to be the philosophy of a future Conservative government then the country would be set on an unpleasant course of disruptive confrontation throughout industry. Fortunately in Messrs Prior and Hayhoe the party still has spokesmen who have their feet on the ground, but they are isolated from the bulk of Tory opinion and as yet have received no specific support from their leader, whose election campaign against Mr Heath was promoted by the same Mr Gorst, and who relies on Sir Keith Joseph as her main policy adviser.

Yours, etc,

DAVID STEEL,
House of Commons.

September 13.

14.9.77

DRAFT LETTER TO THE TIMES

AC 102 / BT 3-486

Your thoughtful and stimulating leader put most of my own views on the vexed question of my party's relations with the trade union movement far more cogently than I myself could have done - and at greater length than you would have permitted me. But one misprision of my position, further magnified in your lead story, and carried to absurdity in Mr. Steel's letter.

First, pace your lead story, Mrs. Thatcher's statement on the closed shop, judging from the reports, fully reflects my own views as I should like to think it does Mr. Prior's too. The closed shop is an evil, one of the many evils which we Conservatives do not believe can automatically be resolved by government action; that is why we are Conservatives.

DRAFT - TIMES LETTER

The closed shop will be prised away from our industrial life mainly by the resistance of millions of working people - by hand and brain, as the saying goes - who reject the arguments used to justify it and fight for their rights. Any party which favours freedom will support and encourage these rebels against coercion; but the main struggle will be their's however organised.

DRAFT - TIMES LETTER

But the closed shop is only one corner of the problem of relationships with the trade unions. As a party, we have yet to bring to the public - unionists and non-unionists alike - the message so eloquently carried in your leading article, namely, that whereas we may regard trade unions in theory as a valuable integrative element in an excessively atomised society, trade-unions as they have become during our own lifetimes have caused impoverishments to all. To say this is not union-bashing, but a fact staring us in the face.

DRAFT - TIMES LETTER

This determines the objectives which Conservative strategy must seek to reach. Naturally, they entail "the avoidance of unnecessary conflict with the trade unions". But they must also safeguard the free society and economic rationality. Some of the trade union leaders are committed to political aims which are not only unacceptable to us but inimical to a free society as we understand it: Jack Jones, for example, avowedly admires soviet society and regards it as above criticism, whereas we regard it as an ugly despotism, detrimental to the interests of all classes in society except for the party and military oligarchy.

DRAFT - TIMES LETTER

A Conservative government will have the obligation to govern. Insofar as the Trade Union leaders try to use their power to ensure that their Labour movement rules whoever the people elect to office and insist on attitudes which run counter to the economic logic you have expounded, our task will be all the harder.

The main burden of such behaviour will be carried by the public at large, including their own members, all or nearly all of whom are now worse off than they would have been had union (and government) policies been more enlightened. But govern we shall.

DRAFT - TIMES LETTER

However, governing will not mean poking our nose into every issue and laying down the law. We are cured of that mistake. Mr. Steel's compulsive inability to grasp this underlies his misrepresentation of my position over Grunwick and the conclusions he draws from it. I do not believe it is the duty of government to become involved or take sides in an industrial dispute, on either side. The law is there and within the law participants must work out their own salvation.

The government intervened in Grunwick not to bring peace but to coerce the employer in order to help union leaders out of a mess they had got into by their close alliance with revolutionary elements.

DRAFT - TEMES LETTER

Lord Justice Scarman was inveigled into lending his judicial ermine to cloak this shabby manoeuvre. In condemning this I was not taking sides; I was simply saying that government (and opposition) have no place but that government and union leaders were coming dangerously close to tacit division of labour with the SWP rentamob, combining legal with illegal tactics to use Lenin's dictum.

Is Mr. Steel so much the prisoner of his pact with Mr. Callaghan that his critical senses are dulled to a point where he comes increasingly to sound more like his own heavily-infiltrated young liberals, than the leader of Gladstone's Party.