

Tim

ARTICLE BY EMPLOYMENT SECRETARY TOM KING FOR  
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'The longer it goes on the nastier it will get' - these were the prophetic words of one union leader to me in the very early days of the miners strike. He was certainly right and yet I wonder if he ever guessed to what depths of nastiness it would sink.

For many weeks the country has had to endure night after night scenes of mass picketing and violence, as police have striven manfully to maintain the rights of all those who wished to go to work. These scenes have been unpleasant enough, and many people have been charged with serious offences which could carry substantial sentences.

Yet even these are now overshadowed by the appalling events of the past week. All pretence that this is somehow being conducted as a normal industrial dispute, that the mobs we saw in action last week are somehow lawful pickets, or that violence only arises from the presence of the police, all these pretences have been thrown aside, and a nastier and more ugly face revealed.

In nights of terror mobs have gone on the rampage smashing property and terrorising individual miners in their own home. But these weren't mindless thugs, or some drunken brawlers after closing time. These were carefully co-ordinated attacks planned by people who care no longer for any standards of conduct in industrial disputes, or for the future of the industry that they have been claiming to defend. These terror squads pose the clearest challenge to us all. Do we want to live in a country where its citizens can be equally protected under the law, or one in which mob violence and terror rule the day?

That's the question, and it can't be ducked any longer by anybody who actually cares about what happens to this country. This violence is quite intolerable and must be stopped NOW.

What I now want to hear is that same total condemnation from others as well - Mr Kinnock and his Labour colleagues, other trade union leaders, and particularly Mr Scargill and his colleagues.

It is clear that these latest terror attacks are being carefully planned and co-ordinated. I understand the NUM are denying that they are planning and co-ordinating them but that denial alone won't do. If they wish to carry credibility it is not enough to say they are not organising the violence: they must denounce it and take every step they can to help stop it. Otherwise those who fail to condemn it will themselves be condemned.

And now in this of all weeks there are stories that other trade unionists are going to be asked to give further support to the NUM, some crazy "Big Bang" strike theory, that the extremists are trying to sell. Are people really going to be asked to take action in support of the rioters, hoodlums and thugs who seem to have taken over this dispute, and when the NUM has failed to persuade all its own members to strike?

Every day tens of thousands of miners, denied their right to vote in a ballot, are voting with their feet not to join the battle of the mob. They are working on, bravely standing out against the disgraceful violence and intimidation. And even among the miners brought out on strike the bewilderment and resentment is growing by the day.

Moreover, trade unions would be ordering their members to strike in support of miners who have been offered:

- a pay offer keeping miners 25 per cent above average earnings and giving face workers about £10,000 a year.
- a job for everyone who wants to stay in the industry
- the most generous terms for those who volunteer to leave.
- the promise of £3,000 million of investment, funded by the taxpayer.

That's an offer most negotiators would be delighted with. No wonder Arthur Scargill dare not risk a ballot.

So who does want a "Big Bang" strike? Those union leaders who want to show their political muscle and curry favour with the militants. The bully-boy gangs who can be seen most evenings on television disgracing the name of the Trade Union Movement. Foreigners would gain because they would pick up the jobs we threw away. But above all the militants would gain because they want to change society by force rather than by the ballot box.

And who will the losers be? The trade union leaders who do care about their members and their prospects. Ordinary trade union members who would be forced to sacrifice their pay and in the process put their own jobs at risk. The unemployed whose best hope of a job must lie in a Britain at work and not on strike.

The TUC, which has seen its best efforts to bring some order and decency to the conduct of industrial disputes treated with contempt. Its codes of practice on the conducts of disputes and peaceful picketing lie trampled in the dust of Orgreave, Llanwern and Bilston Glen. But above all, the greatest loss would be to the British traditions of democracy, tolerance and respect for the law.

All I know about "Big Bangs" is that a lot of people usually get hurt. This would be no exception. What the miners actually need is not a "Big Bang" but a big ballot. All the bitterness and misery of the last six months that have made this strike so divisive and nasty stem directly from not having the ballot that the rules require. That is what must now happen and anyone with a tongue to speak should say so loud and clear.