

SPEECH BY THE RT HON PETER WALKER MBE MP MADE TO THE NATIONAL  
YOUNG CONSERVATIVES SUMMER SCHOOL IN MANCHESTER ON 2 SEPTEMBER 1984

The TUC is divided - union against union, leaders against rank and file. The NUM is divided - with one third at work, having voted in ballots not to strike, and two-thirds on strike, having been deprived of a ballot and being kept from working by mob picketing. The National Coal Board is losing millions of pounds as coal face after coal face is destroyed by neglect. The country is suffering from violence, loss of production and loss of markets. The simple fact is that there would have been no trouble for the TUC, the NUM, the Coal Board or the country if the NUM had complied with its normal procedures and had held a ballot before the strike took place. The rejection of that procedure has brought division and misery.

The TUC this week has a duty to be the true voice of its members and not the expression of a minority and extremist political viewpoint. Is Brighton going to be another Tilbury? At Tilbury the rank and file trade unionists voted decisively not to strike. In their absence, a small minority of extremists manipulated a strike in order to foster their own extreme political objectives. Is the TUC to do the same? Opinion poll after opinion poll has made it clear that the vast majority of trade unionists want the miners to have a ballot, and do not want to support Mr Scargill with money, with strike action or in any other way. Listen to respected trade union leaders of the calibre of Bill Sirs, Terry Duffy, John Lyons and last year's Chairman of the TUC Frank Chappell - men who have devoted their lives to the trade union movement and who want the TUC to influence governments and improve the living standards of their members. In the last few days they have pleaded with the TUC not to create unemployment and ruin our reviving economy in order to support a man who refuses to ballot his members and whose views have been decisively rejected by the 70,000 miners who have been given the opportunity of a ballot.

I would like to say to delegates at the TUC that this dispute could end this week without a single days work being lost in any



industry. The National Coal Board is willing to offer, and the Government is willing to underwrite, an exciting and rewarding "Plan for Coal" which would cover the coming years. The Plan would involve further massive investment in the industry - investment in new coalfields where high productivity and low-cost coal can be obtained, and also investment in better machinery and new coal faces in many existing collieries. The Plan would include early retirement and voluntary redundancy payments for miners affected by the closure of pits which are no longer beneficial or economic. These payments would mean that every miner wishing to remain in the industry will be able to do so. The Plan would also incorporate a well organised marketing programme - so that strenuous efforts will be made to sell both at home and abroad the cheap coal produced from the massive investment programmes of the past and next decades. We have the opportunity of becoming the most successful and largest coal producer in Western Europe.

The National Coal Board have always been willing to discuss and work out such a Plan. It is time that the NUM ended this totally unnecessary strike and worked creatively, in collaboration with the Board and the Government, to see that the industry has a good future. If, instead of this, the TUC encourage the NUM Executive, under the command of their President, to continue with the use of an army of mob pickets that have already been charged with more than 5,000 criminal offences, and if the TUC encourage the continuation of a conflict which is jeopardising the jobs of their own members in the steel industry, in many other industries and those miners who have voted to go to work in ballots, then they will be taking a course which will certainly damage the prospects of full employment in this country and at the same time damage the success of our whole economy.