

NHS Pay

Mr. Fowler had quite a tough time in the House.

For the Opposition, Mrs. Dunwoody, strident as ever, said that the Government had left itself with this year's problem by abolishing Clegg. ACAS was the best available machinery to resolve the problem. The Government had done nothing about low pay in the health services. Even the regional chairmen were opposed to the Government's stance (a point on which she was in fact misinformed). In reply, Mr. Fowler ruled out arbitration on the grounds that the Government could not sub-contract to an arbitrator the decision on what the nation could afford.

From the Opposition benches, the Government came under fierce attack from the predictable hard-liners like Willie Hamilton, Reg Race, Doug Hoyle, and Martin Flannery. The Government had treated health services workers shabbily, and was insisting on a further lowering of their living standards. The Government's niggardliness had driven them to industrial action. For the Liberals, Clement Freud found that the statement gave neither hope nor credit to the nurses. For the SDP, Mike Thomas wanted to see a fair incomes policy. Lawrence Cunliffe argued that the Government was widely out of touch with public opinion. Sooner or later, the health service unions would have to have a meeting with the Secretary of State and the Prime Minister, to hammer out an improved offer. ^{Allen} ~~Alan~~ McKay pointed to the growing support from the miners, the seamen, the water workers and the power workers. The Government must go to arbitration.

There was some uncertainty even on the Government benches. Edward Du Cann spoke of some sympathy with the low paid, but argued fiercely that doctors alone should judge emergencies - a point picked up by Jill Knight and Brian Mawhinney. Nicholas Winterton said that the Government had given a commitment before the election to treat various groups as special cases. This had

been honoured for the police and the armed forces, but many people found the offer to the nurses inadequate.

Peter Emery pressed for the use of volunteers during the dispute. Sheila Faith stressed the value of job security by comparison with the private sector. Ralph Howell wished Mr. Fowler to agree with him that the health service was seriously overmanned.

Concluding, Mrs. Dunwoody came back to comparability. Mr. Fowler stood on the importance of the Government's search for new permanent arrangements, yet the Government had destroyed Clegg which could provide this. If the Government were so confident, they should take their case to ACAS.

The fact is that the health workers got much more sympathy from the House than Mr. Fowler would have wished to see. The Government still has an uphill battle on this one.

Duty Clerk.

PP M Pattison

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