

COAL

THE "ENEMY WITHIN"

I described the militants and wreckers as the enemy within. How would the Rt Hon Gentleman describe those responsible for:

- the assaults on working miners at Bilston Glen;
- the seige of management staff at Rossington;
- the stone throwing mob who attacked the home of a working miner in Shirebrook on Sunday night;
- the appalling intimidation of the families of those who wish to work throughout the coalfields?

I believe those who use such tactics to gain their ends are the enemies of a free society. Surely the Rt Hon Gentleman does not regard them as friends?

PRIME MINISTER'S DISLIKE OF TRADE UNIONS

It is this Government which has introduced legislation to give trade unions back to their members. The Labour Party oppose that legislation. It is also the Labour Party which has attacked the Nottinghamshire miners who throughout this dispute have behaved entirely in accordance with the rules of their union and with democratic procedures.

THE NEGOTIATIONS

The offer which has been made by the NCB is a fair and reasonable one. What the union is seeking to establish is a totally new principle: that pits should stay open regardless of whether they are beneficial to the industry or not.

There was no such principle in Plan for Coal; nor did the last Labour

Government accept it. The reason is simple: no responsible Government could accept a unlimited subsidy to the coal industry; no responsible Government can write a blank cheque on the taxpayer.

#### LABOUR RECORD ON CLOSURES

The last Labour Government accepted the need for closures on economic grounds. As the final report of the coal industry examination, which was signed by Mr Eric Varley and the hon Member for Midlothian said "inevitably some pits will have to close as their useful economic returns of coal are depleted". Even the Rt Hon Member for Chesterfield accepted need for economic closures. For example at the Graig Merthyr pit which was closed in 1978 there were 3 to 4 years of coal left. If the Rt Hon Gentleman's position now is that pits should remain open whether they are beneficial or not he is repudiating the record of the Government which he supported.

#### FURTHER NEGOTIATIONS?

Mr MacGregor has made it clear that he is ready to meet the leaders of the NUM to discuss a settlement at any time. He has equally made it clear that the Rt Hon Gentleman's claim that the NUM had asked for further talks last week was not true.

#### EFFECT ON THE STEEL INDUSTRY

Despite all the efforts of the leadership of the NUM to damage the steel industry recent production has been at its prestrike level. Nevertheless, if the strike continues it will put at risk steel workers' jobs. As the leaders of the steel workers' trade union, Mr Bill Sirs, said last week, the NUM have shown themselves "prepared to render thousands of brother trade unionists in the steel industry permanently jobless".

## STRIKE NOT POLITICAL, BUT TO PROTECT JOBS

What is on offer to the miners is better on every count than under Labour. There is more investment, better pay, and better voluntary redundancy terms. Since more miners' jobs have been lost under Labour Governments than under Conservative Governments why did the strike not take place under a Labour Government?

## COST OF THE DISPUTE

The figures which the hon Gentleman quotes are pure invention. The real cost to the taxpayer would be to accept that subsidies already running at £130 per miner per week and in the case of the most uneconomical pits over £90 per tonne, should not only continue indefinitely but increase without limit.

## EFFECT OF THE STRIKE

Orders are being lost. In the second quarter of last year 169 firms applied for coal conversion grants. In the same 3 months this year there have been more withdrawals than applications.

Pits are being put at risk: faces have been lost at Rossington, Bold, Tilmanstone and Goldthorpe.

Miners have lost over £350 million in wages.

MR. BENN ON THE COAL INDUSTRY

"It is the Government's policy to phase out subsidies to the nationalised industries. In line with this the Government hope that the coal industry will be able to operate without the need for assistance apart from social grants."

(OR, 27 November 1975, Col. 1062)

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"The precise manpower needed will depend on the industry's competitive ability to take advantage of the market opportunities for coal and on realising the necessary advances in productivity."

(OR, 30 June 1975, Co. 1001:

In answer to a Question from Mr. Gwilym Roberts for his estimate of the number of jobs that would be available in the coal mining industry by the years 1980 and 1985)

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"It is in the development of new higher productivity pits that the National Coal Board hopes to achieve its long term production for its energy needs."

(OR, 2 March 1975, Col. 442)

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"I have never found the NUM in any way unreasonable where closures are necessary because of exhaustion or because pits are out of line in economic terms."

(OR, 4 December 1978, Col. 1016)

Coal Mining  
Dispute

Any group or individual seeking to intimidate or coerce the British Government or people by extra-Parliamentary action can fairly be described as "the enemy within". They are self-evidently the enemies of democracy, of Parliament, of constitutional government, and hence of our people at large.