

1 October 1984


PRIME MINISTER

At today's Labour Party Conference, Eric Heffer opened the debate on the miners. He stated, comparing the industrial struggle and the political struggle: "at certain periods the industrial struggle takes precedence . . . (now) both industrial and political action are essential".

He argued that current police action against the miners and the Greenham women showed that civil liberties were at risk, and promised "policies of non-compliance" with local authority abolition and rate-capping.

He said the National Executive was pledged to "unqualified support to the miners" and pointed out that the Executive had warned "mass use of police was provocative . . . we have been proved right".

Tony Benn stressed that in the National Executive statement, "there is no criticism of the miners, many of whom have been so grossly provoked". He pledged "100 per cent support for the miners, designed to hasten a victory". The Government was using the police "to harass and assault the miners" and was busy "manipulating the bail conditions". He vowed "we will never accept the divine right of management" and looked for a Socialist energy policy in which "fuel is a service and not a business".



When Eric Hammond and David Basnett attempted to condemn extreme violence, they were booed down by a Conference determined to give the miners full emotional backing in their struggle.

Both Eric Heffer and Jim Mortimer, Party Chairman and Party Secretary respectively, have supported the miners in the statement passed by the Party Executive. It was Jim Mortimer, the Party Secretary, who went on record as saying "we are saying there should be no pit closures on economic grounds" (Morning Star, 27 September).

JOHN REDWOOD

MA

LABOUR PARTY CONFERENCE

NUM Motion carried by the Conference:

This conference pays tribute to the historic struggle of the miners in 1984 which has attracted the widest support of the trade union and labour movement and congratulates all those men and women who have contributed so magnificently to the defence of jobs, communities, trade unionism, and socialist principles.

The conference deplores the total dishonesty of the Conservative Government during the miners' dispute for which it is held wholly responsible having, through the National Coal Board, deliberately violated the Plan for Coal by the declaration that 20 pits and 20,000 jobs had to go as a first instalment of their rundown of the industry.

It recognizes that this policy stems not only from their dogmatic adherence to monetarist economic policies, but a determination to attack the NUM and the whole trade union movement by repressive legislation and an unprecedented and wholesale operation involving unlawful actions by the police, organized violence against miners, their picket lines, and their communities by means of an unconstitutional nationally controlled police force.

The conference declares that the manifesto of the next Labour government will reaffirm wholehearted commitment to the Plan for Coal and introduce an integrated energy policy based on an expanding and healthy coal industry to protect and develop jobs for our young people, making sure that technological innovations both improve working conditions for miners and actually increase and enhance their job prospects.

1 October 1984

LABOUR QUOTES ON COAL

25 March 1976 - Mr Alex Eadie, Under-Sec. of State for Energy

Mr Alex Eadie: "Although we all sincerely believe that the sort of colliery closure programmes we saw in the late 1960s and early 1970s have gone for ever, mining is an extractive industry, its working medium is constantly changing, and from time to time pits will inevitably have to close because reserves have become exhausted or grossly uneconomic. Where possible the men displaced from the closing pits are found work in continuing ones, but, unfortunately, this cannot always cover all the men, and some have to be made redundant - and miners made redundant in this way will continue to have special problems. Many of them live in isolated colliery villages where alternative employment is just not available. The older ones find it difficult to adapt to other work or, after a lifetime of work in a harsh environment, may be sick or maimed.

The Government have therefore thought it right to continue for a further period the arrangements which have been in existence since the middle 1960s for paying benefit to men who find themselves in these unfortunate circumstances." (vol 908 col 717-718)

2 March 1977 - Mr Tony Benn, Sec of State for Energy

Mr Tony Benn: "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."

(vol 927 col 442)

LABOUR QUOTES ON COAL (CONT)

20 March 1978 - Mr Alex Eadie, Under-Sec. of State for Energy

Mr Eadie: "Collieries still become exhausted or geological difficulties make them uneconomic to work. In these circumstances they have to be closed and men are made redundant or are redeployed in the industry."

(vol 946 col 1198)

4 December 1978 - Mr Tony Benn, Sec of State for Energy

Mr Benn: "The closure of collieries has been traditionally a matter for the National Coal Board after full consultation with the unions under the colliery review procedure. As I announced in a parliamentary answer on 8th May, I have suggested that closures should be mutually agreed between the National Coal Board and the unions, and some discussion on this proposal has taken place."

(vol 959 col 1014)

5 February 1979 - Mr Tony Benn, Sec of State for Energy

Mr Benn: "Not only have I not turned my back on the discussions, but last week I chaired a meeting - a meeting which is due to be resumed next week - about the future of the mining industry. That is the proper way for a Minister to act. I am not prepared to negotiate with the NUM, which is a task placed by Parliament on the shoulders of the NCB."

(vol 962 col 8)

19 March 1979 - Mr Tony Benn, Sec of State for Energy

Q. Mr Smith: "When the Secretary of State next meets the chairman of the National Coal Board, will he commend him, and through him the NUM executive, on the pay deal that has been reached? Will he tell the chairman that he would have preferred differentials to have been maintained, but that nevertheless, he hopes the miners will vote for the deal in next week's ballot?"

/A. Mr Benn:

LABOUR QUOTES ON COAL (CONT)

A. Mr Benn: No, I shall do none of those things, for the simple reason that the negotiations that have taken place between the Coal Board and the NUM have followed a joint examination of the prospects for the industry under the planning agreement signed with the NCB. Parliamentary comments about the way in which an agreed overall settlement is divided between different groups are not appropriate or helpful. It is better to leave it to the bargaining that takes place within the industry."

(vol 964 col 1074)