

NON-ATTRIBUTABLE BACKGROUND

TRADE UNION REFORM

"A Bill will be introduced to give trade union members greater control over their unions."

The Government will introduce legislation to bring about further trade union reforms in three main areas. As announced on May 18, 1983 in the Conservative Manifesto, the Government will give union members the right to:

- have democratic and secret ballots for the election of their governing bodies.
- decide periodically, say every ten years or so, whether their unions should have party political funds.

The Government also announced its intention to remove immunity against legal action where a trade union called a strike without giving its members an opportunity to approve or disapprove the action through a fair and secret ballot.

The TUC will be invited to discuss steps which the unions themselves can take to ensure that individual members are freely and effectively able to decide for themselves whether or not to pay the political levy.

There will also be consultation about the need for specified essential services to be governed by adequate procedure agreements, breach of which would deprive industrial action of immunity.

The Government has always made clear that it is determined to protect individuals and the community from the abuse of trade union power. The 1980 and 1982 Employment Acts widened the grounds for claiming unfair dismissal in a closed shop, substantially increased the compensation available and promoted the regular testing of support for closed shops through secret ballots. The legislation tackled other important issues such as secondary action and secondary picketing and made trade unions accountable for any unlawful industrial action they organise.

However, there is still much public concern about the need for trade unions to become more democratic and responsive to the wishes of their members. Following the refusal of the trade unions to reform themselves voluntarily the Government issued a Green Paper, "Democracy in Trade Unions", in January 1983 (Cmnd.8778, HMSO).

TRADE UNION REFORM (contd.)

Responses to the Green Paper confirmed that there is widespread concern about trade union procedures for elections and for consulting members on major issues, particularly on strike decisions. There was widespread support for measures that would enable trade union members to have a greater say in the affairs of their unions.

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