

# Labour is accused of 'big lie' over police

By Philip Webster  
Political Reporter

The Home Secretary said yesterday that the Labour Party was making a carefully planned attempt to shake public confidence in the role of law and the police.

In a fierce denunciation of Labour's attitude to the miners' dispute, Mr Leon Brittan accused it of perpetrating "the big lie" that it was the police, and not the pickets, who were challenging principles of freedom and democracy, and that it was from the policeman, who upheld the law, rather than from the criminal, who broke it, that the threat to the public came.

Mr Brittan, speaking in Gwent, said that the big lie always attracted unscrupulous politicians - repeat what was manifestly untrue and often enough, their thinking went, and the public would believe you.

Mr Brittan's remarks indicated that the Government, which is maintaining its refusal to intervene in the dispute despite the decision of other big unions to support the miners, has now decided to make Labour's criticism of the police a political issue. The party's national executive on Wednesday blamed the police for contributing to violence.

Mr Brittan said that to read the comments of Labour spokesmen one would think Britain was on the way to becoming a police state. Those who made such foolish allegations should stop and think; they should remember that it was all too easy to devalue the political currency by grave accusations against those in whose impartial enforcement of the rule of law the public trusted.

Labour's "shabby tactics" were far from new, Mr Brittan said. For months Labour politicians had been attacking Government measures in the Police and Criminal Evidence Bill to give the police the powers they needed to protect the citizen. Thousands of pounds of ratepayers' money had been poured by left wing councils into propaganda against the Bill. "No innuendo has been too malicious; no allegation about the Government's intentions too wild."

Mr Brittan said the public would not be fooled; they expected the law of the land to be upheld.

Unlike many Labour MPs who want him to take a higher profile in the dispute, Mr Neil Kinnock remains anxious to avoid raising the political temperature. He does not intend to intervene publicly but he has made clear his belief that the NUM should stop its internal arguments because of the damage that public strife can cause the Labour movement.

Mr John Gummer, the Conservative chairman, said yesterday that the dispute was between the coal board and the miners' union and they must find their own way out of it. The only part the state had to play was to ensure that people wanting to go to work should be allowed to do so, he said in Leeds.

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