

Benn told: stop licking Scargill's boots

COAL DISPUTE

In a Commons question time clash with Mr Tony Benn over the coal miners' dispute, Mr Norman Tebbit, Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, wondered why Mr Benn did not give some comradely support to Mr Bill Sirs, the steel workers' union leader, instead of "for ever licking the boots of Mr Scargill."

Mr Tebbit was reporting to the House that the dispute had had no effect on the output and performance of the vast majority of United Kingdom industries. Imports of oil, coal and coke had increased, he said and there had been some reduction in steel exports.

He also wondered why Labour MPs did not speak up for steel workers staying at work to save their jobs.

Mr Ronald Davies (Caerphilly, Lab) in May the balance of payments worsened by £200m because of the additional oil imports. Industrial production is being hit by increased energy costs. Will Mr Tebbit use all his tact and diplomacy to persuade the Secretary of State for Energy (Mr Peter Walker) that it is in the national interest for him to intervene speedily to end the coal dispute?

Mr Tebbit: It is difficult to know how much influence the import of oil has had because of the miners' strike and how much of the change in the balance of payments has been due to stockpiling, perhaps because of concern about events in the Gulf.

But there is little doubt that Mr Scargill has had great success in converting much of Britain's industry and our power generation from the use of coal to oil. Presumably that is what he intended.

I hope Mr Davies will use his tact and persuasion to influence Mr Scargill to come to the negotiating table without precondition and use his tact and diplomacy to support Mr Bill Sirs and the steelworkers and transport workers and 60,000 coal board employees still at work and not just back the minority clique of Scargill.

Sir Anthony Grant (Cambridgeshire, South West, C) said the most devastating effect on British trade and industry would be caused by surrender and appeasement to a violent minority of the mine-workers' union.

Would Mr Tebbit assure him that his department and the Government as a whole would not encourage any such surrender or intervene on those lines?

Mr Tebbit: I give that assurance. Such a surrender would also put the miners now at work, and the steelworkers, at the mercy of a bunch of most ruthless and violent bullies.

Mr Kevin Barron (Rother Valley, Lab) said 120,000 miners were on strike. They had been penalized, especially their families, by the Government. So 60,000 at work was not a majority.

Mr Tebbit replied that he was referring not only to the mine-workers but to the 70,000 steelworkers in British Steel Corporation, and the transport workers loyally carrying coal to help that industry survive.

In any case (he added) we know not what the majority of coal miners think because Mr Scargill is scared to have a ballot.

Mr Frederick Silvester (Manchester, Withington, C) asked if it was the amount of substitution, which has taken place as a result of the strike, away from coal. What about loss of overseas orders?

Mr Tebbit said it would be prudent to wait for a final assessment until the strike ended.

But we do know (he added) that despite the impressive contract for the supply of coke to Durham, negotiated by Mr MacGregor (chairman of the National Coal Board), the coal for that is being supplied from Europe.

The IC conversion scheme had been held in abeyance, and the flood of applications which had been coming in to help industry to convert from oil to coal had virtually stopped.

Many people were taking a gloomy view on whether it would be right to rely in future on the coal board to supply coal.

I believe they are wrong (he said). At the end of this dispute it will be quite clear that the majority of moderate miners who want to work have won and that in future they will behave in the same manner as the steelworkers are behaving - determined to make sure that their industry survives by supplying good products reliably to customers.

Mr Benn (Cheshire, Lab): Does Mr Tebbit think it helpful to describe what, even on his own figures, would be 120,000 miners as ruthless and violent bullies? The future of our trade and industry depends on the skill of miners, not on whether they are behaving - determined to make sure that their industry survives by supplying good products reliably to customers.

How can he hope to secure the cooperation of these people by more violent, bitter and unprincipled abuse from the Secretary of State? Mr Tebbit said he had not referred to the 120,000 miners on strike in those terms. Mr Benn should try listening instead of making up fairy tales.

Not even in the worst scenes of violent picketing had they seen 120,000 miners, but a tiny majority of violent bullies who were bullying the majority of miners and wanted to bully 70,000 steelworkers into losing their jobs too.

Why doesn't Mr Benn (he added) give some comradely support to Bill Sirs instead of for ever licking the boots of Mr Scargill?

Mr Timothy Egan (Enfield, North, C) said that not long ago Mr Benn had complained about high electricity costs for industry. Some 80 per cent of electricity was usually generated from coal.

By opposing closures of uneconomic pits, Mr Benn was asking for a higher electricity cost.

Mr Tebbit: Yes - But that is because he is the captive of one small union. He refuses to speak up for the steelworkers, transport workers, the car workers and all the others whose jobs are being put at risk.

Mr Geoffrey Lofthouse (Ponterferry, Lancashire, Lab) the recent statement - by Mr MacGregor advising senior management to keep the strike going to the end of the year - is totally irresponsible and the action of a mindless bully.

Mr Tebbit: Mr MacGregor did not advise his managers to continue the strike. He advised them to seek to get the strike going to the end of the year - is totally irresponsible and the action of a mindless bully.

What would be helpful would be if Mr Lofthouse, who has some

Mr Tony Baldry (Banbury, C) was given leave to bring in a Bill on the prevention of intimidatory picketing which, he said, would hit the pockets of those unions which allowed or encouraged their members to intimidate or use violence.

The Bill would give police authorities the right to reclaim as a civil debt the costs attributable where there had been a need for police officers to attend a site where pickets exceeded six.

He said the code of conduct which accompanied industrial relations acts of 1980 and 1981 - a code agreed with the TUC - stated that there need be no more than six pickets at any site. That made sense. It did not need more than six people to make it clear a strike was on.

If there was a right to strike, there was also a right to go to work. Picketing was lawful only when it sought to peacefully persuade.

What had been seen in the past few weeks was not picketing at all. It was an attempt by force to prevent others from doing what they had a right to do. It was intimidation, an attempt to substitute the rule-of-law by the rule of the mob.

The Bill sought to help prevent intimidatory picketing. The direct cost of extra policing could be reclaimed as a civil debt. It would be a defence that the union concerned had taken all reasonable steps to limit the number of pickets to six.

Unlike an injunction, which was a mandatory order of the court, there would be no question under the Bill of anyone being able to seek to become a martyr and go to prison. It would go a long way to bring the heavy mob under control.

The Bill was read a first time.



Hardy: Upheaval of supplies to steel works

In view of his references to the steelworkers I invite him to meet Mr Sirs and his colleagues to consider the doubtful approach that has so far been adopted by the ESC in regard to supplies of coke and coal to Scunthorpe.

Many believe there has been a determined and calculated effort to make sure there has been as much upheaval as possible in regard to that supply.

Mr Tebbit: That is quite disgraceful. Mr Hardy knows full well that from the top to the bottom of BSC, managers, workers, everybody is united to keep going.

They are determined to use the coal, coke and iron ore that is going into the steel works despite everything that the Scargill clique are doing to try and prevent and to break British steel.

Mr Tony Baldry (Banbury, C) was given leave to bring in a Bill on the prevention of intimidatory picketing which, he said, would hit the pockets of those unions which allowed or encouraged their members to intimidate or use violence.

The Bill would give police authorities the right to reclaim as a civil debt the costs attributable where there had been a need for police officers to attend a site where pickets exceeded six.

He said the code of conduct which accompanied industrial relations acts of 1980 and 1981 - a code agreed with the TUC - stated that there need be no more than six pickets at any site. That made sense. It did not need more than six people to make it clear a strike was on.

If there was a right to strike, there was also a right to go to work. Picketing was lawful only when it sought to peacefully persuade.

What had been seen in the past few weeks was not picketing at all. It was an attempt by force to prevent others from doing what they had a right to do. It was intimidation, an attempt to substitute the rule-of-law by the rule of the mob.

The Bill sought to help prevent intimidatory picketing. The direct cost of extra policing could be reclaimed as a civil debt. It would be a defence that the union concerned had taken all reasonable steps to limit the number of pickets to six.

Unlike an injunction, which was a mandatory order of the court, there would be no question under the Bill of anyone being able to seek to become a martyr and go to prison. It would go a long way to bring the heavy mob under control.

The Bill was read a first time.

Councils to fix level of dog licences

ENVIRONMENT

The Government is proposing to legislate to change the dog licensing system. It believes the present national scheme should be dropped and local authorities be allowed to introduce their own arrangements tailored to local needs.

Mr William Watdegrave, Under Secretary for the Environment, said at the end of a Commons debate on Department of the Environment estimates, that the Government was resolved to settle the issue of the dog licence.

The cost of issuing the 375p licences was now substantially greater than the revenue they produced. The Government recognized there was great benefit in responsible dog ownership. They must also recognize the great concern about the serious problems caused by dogs which were not properly controlled and cared for.

The Government believe (he continued) that the best way forward lies in new legislation to replace the present national dog licensing system with a provision for local authorities to introduce their own licensing and registration arrangements which they can tailor to their local needs, the revenue raised being devoted to appropriate dog welfare and control activities.

The Government will, therefore, issue a consultation paper in the near future, setting out the options and making detailed proposals for change.

Mr Andrew Bowden (Brighton, Kempton, C) intervened to say the proposal would give the anti-dog local authorities that existed throughout the country draconian powers. The Government would face massive opposition.

Mr Tony Baldry (Banbury, C) was given leave to bring in a Bill on the prevention of intimidatory picketing which, he said, would hit the pockets of those unions which allowed or encouraged their members to intimidate or use violence.

The Bill would give police authorities the right to reclaim as a civil debt the costs attributable where there had been a need for police officers to attend a site where pickets exceeded six.

He said the code of conduct which accompanied industrial relations acts of 1980 and 1981 - a code agreed with the TUC - stated that there need be no more than six pickets at any site. That made sense. It did not need more than six people to make it clear a strike was on.

If there was a right to strike, there was also a right to go to work. Picketing was lawful only when it sought to peacefully persuade.

What had been seen in the past few weeks was not picketing at all. It was an attempt by force to prevent others from doing what they had a right to do. It was intimidation, an attempt to substitute the rule-of-law by the rule of the mob.

The Bill sought to help prevent intimidatory picketing. The direct cost of extra policing could be reclaimed as a civil debt. It would be a defence that the union concerned had taken all reasonable steps to limit the number of pickets to six.

Unlike an injunction, which was a mandatory order of the court, there would be no question under the Bill of anyone being able to seek to become a martyr and go to prison. It would go a long way to bring the heavy mob under control.

The Bill was read a first time.

East and West should set aside long-range rhetoric

MOSCOW VISIT

Sir Geoffrey Howe, Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, reporting to the Commons on his visit to Moscow earlier this week indicated that little progress had been made on arms control. But, he told MPs, neither Britain nor her allies would take no for an answer.

The Opposition spokesman said the Labour Party was also disappointed with the negative attitude of the Russian leaders.

Sir Geoffrey Howe said: I had five hours of talks with Mr Gromyko and a substantial discussion with Mr Chernomok.

I have to tell the House that I detected no significant change in the Soviet position on the resumption of nuclear arms talks. The Russians displayed continuing scepticism about the West's commitment to an improvement in East-West relations, and to progress in the arms control negotiations in Vienna, Geneva and Stockholm.

I raised a number of other particular issues. I stressed in particular the importance we attached to increasing trade. British exporters should be given a good opportunity to bid for contracts. I also raised the question of better telephone and other facilities for our businessmen and journalists in Moscow.

I extended an invitation to Mr Gromyko to visit Britain in 1985. Mr Gromyko and I were able to discuss a number of international questions which included the Iran-Iraq war, the Middle East, southern Africa, Poland and Afghanistan. I stressed in particular the need for Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan and a peaceful settlement as called for in five successive resolutions of the UN General Assembly.

The visit provided a useful opportunity to expound and carry forward our long-term policy towards the Soviet Union and on East-West relations generally.

I did not go to Moscow with any expectations of rapid results. I was not therefore surprised by the disappointingly negative nature of the Soviet response. They remain apparently unwilling to make a fresh appraisal of the seriousness of the West's approach.

I hope that my visit will lead to more discussions and exchanges with the Soviet Union. It is important to sustain the search for improved relations between East and West on a realistic and long-term basis, and for real progress on arms control. Neither we nor our Allies intend to take no for an answer.

Mr George Robertson, an Opposition spokesman on foreign affairs, said that what should have been a major opportunity to rebuild the dialogue had been squandered and the visit had become only one more opportunity for the Foreign Secretary to be snubbed and dismissed.

"star wars" talks. But the International Herald Tribune had said that US officials were saying they would feel free to raise the issue of the human rights question was raised. Did he feel there is any possibility of a softening of a attitude? What are the next steps after Moscow? Already the Defence Secretary (Mr Heseltine) has changed his position from confronting the Soviet Union to analysing it. Prime Minister has apparently been wiped out.

Sir Geoffrey Howe said he had discussed matters on which there was common concern and some interest was shown over the issue of the Gulf war. Sadly there had been no sign of a positive response to human rights.

Mr Robertson (the added) falls into an error by suggesting I was a cheer leader for the United States. The message was trying to get across in the Soviet Union was precisely the same as the message the other Western leaders had tried to get across.

The "star wars" talks were raised because they came up during this visit and attracted a great deal of attention.

During the last 12 months both the Prime Minister and myself have visited Hungary and the Soviet Union and I have seen Mr Gromyko four times since last September. It is foolish to expect four visits in this context to break the log jam. This must be a long-term exercise undertaken by this Government and all Western governments on behalf of the world. This Government is committed to that search.

Mr James Lamond (Oldham Central and Roston, Lab) did Mr Gromyko, for instance, raise with him the impudence he had in asking the Soviet Union to disarm at the same time as this country is arming to the teeth, ordering new Trident missiles and refusing even to allow them to be counted in the West's arms inventory?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I pointed out to the Soviet leaders that during the last four years the Soviet Union has continued to deploy a growing and massive number of intermediate range missiles and warheads and the West has been prepared to continue the search for arms control agreements.

It is surely only sensible for the Soviet Union to be prepared to return to nuclear arms control talks without conditions as the West is willing to do. Mr Gromyko remained sceptical and unwilling to negotiate on the same terms as the West. Western leaders have put forward consistently for months past. That is the tragedy and the sadness of the gap that has to be bridged.

Mr Norman Atkinson (Totterham, Lab) If he wants the House to take his bridge-building efforts as sincere, should he not first dissociate himself from the remarks of the Prime Minister on four occasions in the past 12 months that the Soviet Union is an evil and vile society and that Soviet leaders such as Mr Chernomok and Mr Gromyko are thoroughly untrustworthy?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I do not recall the Prime Minister's remarks on four occasions in the past 12 months that the Soviet Union is an evil and vile society and that Soviet leaders such as Mr Chernomok and Mr Gromyko are thoroughly untrustworthy?

Mr George Robertson, an Opposition spokesman on foreign affairs, said that what should have been a major opportunity to rebuild the dialogue had been squandered and the visit had become only one more opportunity for the Foreign Secretary to be snubbed and dismissed.

The visit provided a useful opportunity to expound and carry forward our long-term policy towards the Soviet Union and on East-West relations generally.

I did not go to Moscow with any expectations of rapid results. I was not therefore surprised by the disappointingly negative nature of the Soviet response. They remain apparently unwilling to make a fresh appraisal of the seriousness of the West's approach.

I hope that my visit will lead to more discussions and exchanges with the Soviet Union. It is important to sustain the search for improved relations between East and West on a realistic and long-term basis, and for real progress on arms control. Neither we nor our Allies intend to take no for an answer.

Mr George Robertson, an Opposition spokesman on foreign affairs, said that what should have been a major opportunity to rebuild the dialogue had been squandered and the visit had become only one more opportunity for the Foreign Secretary to be snubbed and dismissed.

The visit provided a useful opportunity to expound and carry forward our long-term policy towards the Soviet Union and on East-West relations generally.

I did not go to Moscow with any expectations of rapid results. I was not therefore surprised by the disappointingly negative nature of the Soviet response. They remain apparently unwilling to make a fresh appraisal of the seriousness of the West's approach.

I hope that my visit will lead to more discussions and exchanges with the Soviet Union. It is important to sustain the search for improved relations between East and West on a realistic and long-term basis, and for real progress on arms control. Neither we nor our Allies intend to take no for an answer.

Mr George Robertson, an Opposition spokesman on foreign affairs, said that what should have been a major opportunity to rebuild the dialogue had been squandered and the visit had become only one more opportunity for the Foreign Secretary to be snubbed and dismissed.

The visit provided a useful opportunity to expound and carry forward our long-term policy towards the Soviet Union and on East-West relations generally.

I did not go to Moscow with any expectations of rapid results. I was not therefore surprised by the disappointingly negative nature of the Soviet response. They remain apparently unwilling to make a fresh appraisal of the seriousness of the West's approach.

I hope that my visit will lead to more discussions and exchanges with the Soviet Union. It is important to sustain the search for improved relations between East and West on a realistic and long-term basis, and for real progress on arms control. Neither we nor our Allies intend to take no for an answer.

Mr George Robertson, an Opposition spokesman on foreign affairs, said that what should have been a major opportunity to rebuild the dialogue had been squandered and the visit had become only one more opportunity for the Foreign Secretary to be snubbed and dismissed.

The visit provided a useful opportunity to expound and carry forward our long-term policy towards the Soviet Union and on East-West relations generally.

I did not go to Moscow with any expectations of rapid results. I was not therefore surprised by the disappointingly negative nature of the Soviet response. They remain apparently unwilling to make a fresh appraisal of the seriousness of the West's approach.

I hope that my visit will lead to more discussions and exchanges with the Soviet Union. It is important to sustain the search for improved relations between East and West on a realistic and long-term basis, and for real progress on arms control. Neither we nor our Allies intend to take no for an answer.

Mr George Robertson, an Opposition spokesman on foreign affairs, said that what should have been a major opportunity to rebuild the dialogue had been squandered and the visit had become only one more opportunity for the Foreign Secretary to be snubbed and dismissed.

The visit provided a useful opportunity to expound and carry forward our long-term policy towards the Soviet Union and on East-West relations generally.



Cormack: Intimidated from going to work

Mr Patrick Cormack (Staffordshire South, C) How many colleagues of the right honourable and wrongly damaged Mr Benn have spoken in support of the miners who are at 120,000 on strike who are intimidated from going to work?

Mr Tebbit: He knows the answer, Secretary one of them. And they will not speak up for the steel workers.

Mr Peter Hardy (Wentworth, Lab): For all his many faults Mr Tebbit tends to be rather more open in his politics than some of his cabinet colleagues.

Investors will set price for BT shares

PRIVATIZATION

Every company that had been demutualized had performed better under private sector ownership than it did in the public sector, Mr Norman Tebbit, Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, said during Commons questions. He told Mr Nicholas Budget (Wolverhampton, South West, C) Are the purchasers of BT shares likely to obtain a higher or lower price as a result of the Government blocking the first application by RTZ for the shares of Enterprise Oil?

Mr Tebbit: The price which is offered by investors for British Telecom will be set by their view of



Robertson: We all deplore the Russians' position

Dr David Owen, leader of the SDP: One of the lessons from this chilly occupation is that there should not be a seven year gap in visits ever again between the British Foreign Secretary and the Soviet Foreign Minister. Is Mr Gromyko going to come here next year for a return visit?

Will the Foreign Secretary ensure that in future there will be continuing contact in good times and in bad to ensure a more orderly relationship between the West and the Soviet block?

What was said about the comprehensive test ban? This is one major negotiation where Britain is party to the negotiations with the US and considerable progress has been made in these talks.

He has not talked about chemical weapons which was going to be a British initiative. What happened in 1979 in this and many other cases? Sir Geoffrey Howe: I understand the importance of the need for sustained contact between East and West. Since the time when Dr Owen was holding my office there have been a series of serious actions by the Soviet Union which have done little to improve the prospects of good contact between East and West, including the invasion of Afghanistan and what has happened in Poland.

I did mention all the topics to which he has referred. I emphasized the need we felt for progress on chemical weapons. I referred to the test ban proposal, and I emphasized, on the MBFR talks, the seriousness with which the West put forward their proposals and got a not uncharacteristic response to the effect that our proposals, although based on Eastern proposals, were not based on killing time. That shows how far we have to go in our search for arms agreements.

During the last 12 months both the Prime Minister and myself have visited Hungary and the Soviet Union and I have seen Mr Gromyko four times since last September. It is foolish to expect four visits in this context to break the log jam. This must be a long-term exercise undertaken by this Government and all Western governments on behalf of the world. This Government is committed to that search.

Mr James Lamond (Oldham Central and Roston, Lab) did Mr Gromyko, for instance, raise with him the impudence he had in asking the Soviet Union to disarm at the same time as this country is arming to the teeth, ordering new Trident missiles and refusing even to allow them to be counted in the West's arms inventory?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I pointed out to the Soviet leaders that during the last four years the Soviet Union has continued to deploy a growing and massive number of intermediate range missiles and warheads and the West has been prepared to continue the search for arms control agreements.

It is surely only sensible for the Soviet Union to be prepared to return to nuclear arms control talks without conditions as the West is willing to do. Mr Gromyko remained sceptical and unwilling to negotiate on the same terms as the West. Western leaders have put forward consistently for months past. That is the tragedy and the sadness of the gap that has to be bridged.

Mr Norman Atkinson (Totterham, Lab) If he wants the House to take his bridge-building efforts as sincere, should he not first dissociate himself from the remarks of the Prime Minister on four occasions in the past 12 months that the Soviet Union is an evil and vile society and that Soviet leaders such as Mr Chernomok and Mr Gromyko are thoroughly untrustworthy?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I do not recall the Prime Minister's remarks on four occasions in the past 12 months that the Soviet Union is an evil and vile society and that Soviet leaders such as Mr Chernomok and Mr Gromyko are thoroughly untrustworthy?

Mr George Robertson, an Opposition spokesman on foreign affairs, said that what should have been a major opportunity to rebuild the dialogue had been squandered and the visit had become only one more opportunity for the Foreign Secretary to be snubbed and dismissed.

The visit provided a useful opportunity to expound and carry forward our long-term policy towards the Soviet Union and on East-West relations generally.

I did not go to Moscow with any expectations of rapid results. I was not therefore surprised by the disappointingly negative nature of the Soviet response. They remain apparently unwilling to make a fresh appraisal of the seriousness of the West's approach.

I hope that my visit will lead to more discussions and exchanges with the Soviet Union. It is important to sustain the search for improved relations between East and West on a realistic and long-term basis, and for real progress on arms control. Neither we nor our Allies intend to take no for an answer.

Mr George Robertson, an Opposition spokesman on foreign affairs, said that what should have been a major opportunity to rebuild the dialogue had been squandered and the visit had become only one more opportunity for the Foreign Secretary to be snubbed and dismissed.

The visit provided a useful opportunity to expound and carry forward our long-term policy towards the Soviet Union and on East-West relations generally.

I did not go to Moscow with any expectations of rapid results. I was not therefore surprised by the disappointingly negative nature of the Soviet response. They remain apparently unwilling to make a fresh appraisal of the seriousness of the West's approach.

I hope that my visit will lead to more discussions and exchanges with the Soviet Union. It is important to sustain the search for improved relations between East and West on a realistic and long-term basis, and for real progress on arms control. Neither we nor our Allies intend to take no for an answer.

Mr George Robertson, an Opposition spokesman on foreign affairs, said that what should have been a major opportunity to rebuild the dialogue had been squandered and the visit had become only one more opportunity for the Foreign Secretary to be snubbed and dismissed.

The visit provided a useful opportunity to expound and carry forward our long-term policy towards the Soviet Union and on East-West relations generally.

I did not go to Moscow with any expectations of rapid results. I was not therefore surprised by the disappointingly negative nature of the Soviet response. They remain apparently unwilling to make a fresh appraisal of the seriousness of the West's approach.

Coal Dispute.

The Times (London, England), Thursday, Jul 05, 1984; pg. 4; Issue 61875. (1613 words)

Category: Politics and Parliament

© Times Newspapers Limited

Gale Document Number:CS67342053