

Thatcher onslaught on Kinnock reunites Tories

By Julian Haviland, Political Editor

The Prime Minister, after some troubled months, re-established her authority over the Conservative Party in the Commons yesterday with her most dominant and hostile speech since returning to power at the general election last year.

Mr Neil Kinnock and the Labour Party, who gave her the opportunity by requiring her to defend the Government's economic and industrial performance, she condemned as the ally of the wreckers, in the coal industry and beyond. She presented the Government as the champion of the working miners and their families.

Mr Nigel Lawson, Chancellor of the Exchequer, enraged the Labour Party in the closing moments of the debate when, by injudicious phrasing, he appeared to say that the miners' strike represented a worthwhile investment.

Mr Lawson denied that he had said it, and the record supports Mr Lawson's contention that he was arguing that the closure of uneconomic pits was worthwhile. But after the debate Mr Kinnock believing Mr Lawson vulnerable, demanded an emergency debate today. That was refused, but under pressure the Government agreed that Mr Lawson would make a statement to the Commons today defending himself.

Mrs Thatcher was confronting Mr Kinnock in formal debate for the first time since his election as Labour's leader last autumn. She honoured him at his Parliamentary coming of age with a contempt which she has only occasionally shown before.

The forces to which Mr

Kinnock had lent his voice and support, Mrs Thatcher said, had no more love for parliamentary democracy than for the jobs and homes of those who opposed them.

"Sooner or later, when he has ceased to be of value to their purpose, they will turn on him just as surely as they have turned on the police, on the steelworkers, on the working miners."

Mr Kinnock's voice had grown husky after 40 minutes of his spirited attack. The familiar steely voice of Mrs Thatcher, who like Mr Kinnock was barracked throughout, grew if anything louder as she reached her final indictment.

"There is only one word to describe the policy of the right

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honourable gentleman when faced with threats, whether from home or abroad, and that word is appeasement. He will live to regret it."

The Tory benches leaped and waved in triumph and delight. They will depart for the summer recess today in better heart than had been imaginable before the debate.

Mr Kinnock and his front bench colleagues, and the leftward forces in his parliamentary party who forced the leadership to keep the House sitting so this attack could be launched, had achieved with the help of the spectre at their feast, Mr Arthur Scargill, what no other agency could have done. They had united the Conservatives in righteous or self-righteous resolve.

If Parliament is indeed the

mirror of the nation, then on yesterday's evidence the nation is two irreconcilable factions, unable to comprehend and even unwilling to hear the other.

The hooting class of Conservative MP, well represented yesterday, started on Mr Kinnock when he rose. It was evidence, had he but seen it, that they believe he can wound them give the chance.

The first Conservative to intervene inevitably brought up the coal strike, with the confused accusation that Labour was sitting on the sidelines, aiding and abetting a destructive strike.

No, it was the Government which was sitting on the sidelines, Mr Kinnock replied. Its abdication of responsibility was something for which it would never be forgiven.

The Government's only contribution to what had rightly been described as a ruinous dispute had been to inflame, prolong and embitter it, he said.

For all the Prime Minister's firepower yesterday, Mr Kinnock might well have fared better if his own side had not decided to shoot him in the foot as he reached the starting blocks.

At Prime Minister's question time, Mr Martin Flannery, Labour MP for Sheffield Hillsborough, as if persuaded that he could serve Labour's cause better than his leader, stole the scene by forcing the Speaker to eject him.

He talked about "tame Tory judges", and repeated the phrase when asked to withdraw it.

When the inevitable motion for his expulsion was put, and

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the Labour Front Bench by custom abstained, Mr Eric Heffer, the party chairman and a would-be leader of the left, sprang up to urge his flock into the "no" lobby.

Towards the end of his wind-up speech Mr Lawson dealt with what he called "ill-formed speculation" about the public expenditure costs of the strike.

He put these at about £300m to £350m, and said that had to be seen in perspective against subsidies to the National Coal Board of well over £1,000m last year before the strike "as a result of the losses incurred by uneconomic pits".

"And so, even in narrow financial terms, it represents a worthwhile investment for the good of the nation, and that is before taking account of the wider issues in this dispute."

The Labour ranks exploded, and Mr Lawson had to complete his speech against furious interruptions.

The Government had a majority of 169, defeating the Opposition attack on its economic policies by 353 votes to 184.

● A group of Labour MPs took the rare step last night of tabling a motion criticizing the Speaker for effectively suspending Mr Flannery. The vote was 260 to 80 in favour of suspension.

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