

Scargill is one party's hero, another party's villain

Police will not buckle nor will the Government crack, says Brittan

● Mr Arthur Scargill became the arch-villain at the Conservative conference in Brighton yesterday. The miners were attacking the rule of law, said Mr Leon Brittan, the Home Secretary

● The miners' strike could be the last battle in the attempt to break the union "shackles" on Britain, Mr Norman Tebbit told a fringe meeting

● Mr Brittan also announced new measures to speed up justice, safeguard the independence of chief constables and provide more money to police the pit dispute

● A leading moderate on the executive of the mineworkers' union, Mr Roy Ottey, quit the post in protest at Mr Scargill's attitude to the law

From Julian Haviland, Political Editor, Brighton

The hero of the Labour Party conference, Mr Arthur Scargill, was yesterday made the arch-villain of the Conservative Party conference, when ministers indicted him as a revolutionary whose only real purpose was to destroy the rule of law. There was not a dissenting voice.

The conference, on its opening day at Brighton, acclaimed both Mr Leon Brittan, the Home Secretary, and Mr Peter Walker, Secretary of State for Energy, for speeches, the one on policing, the other on energy, of which the climatic passages, targeted on the miners' leader, might have come from the same pen.

Neither minister allowed Mr Scargill or his cause any legitimacy, either political or industrial.

Mr Brittan told the conference that the coal dispute was not an industrial dispute at all. It was not an attack on the National Coal Board or even on the Government, but on the rule of law itself.

The miners' leaders had not concealed their intentions. They did not recognize the law. They were out not to win a dispute but to win power for the bully, power to turn the country into "a poor, shabby, shoddy look-alike of the Eastern block states they so admired".

But Mr Brittan promised that the police would not buckle nor the Government crack. The right of people to go to their jobs would be defended, the cowards who intimidated women and children would be brought to book. "Those who

take on the law of the land take on the British people, and in them they will meet their match", he said.

The Home Secretary pleased his party by announcing practical measures of support for the police. Any police authority incurring expenditure for policing the dispute beyond three-quarters of the product of a penny rate would be reimbursed in full by the Exchequer for however long the dispute might last.

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Under the Police and Criminal Evidence Bill, there would be a new independent check against any attempt by a police authority to suspend a chief constable. Mr Brittan also announced the appointment of more stipendiary magistrates to help clear the backlog of criminal cases arising from the dispute.

He went out of his way to counter the repeated accusations heard at the Labour Party conference at Blackpool last week that the police were the tool of the Government or at least being used for party political ends. The police were not enforcing his orders, he said. They were not the agents

of the Government but of the community.

Mr Walker said of Mr Scargill that his interest lay in the conflict. His only demand was one which no NUM leader had made before and no Labour government had ever thought about, and every pit must be kept going until all its coal was exhausted, no matter what the price of producing it.

The strike had no possible industrial justification. It had everything to do with the Marxist challenge to parliamentary democracy.

"We are facing a challenge to our whole way of life", he said, adding that the Government would not sacrifice the struggle of "brave, decent, working miners for the sake of an easy compromise. We will not forfeit the right to govern."

The platform had all the support it could have wanted from the floor. One working miner from Cannock and former Conservative parliamentary candidate, Mr Patrick McLoughlin, was cheered when he said that he would continue to cross the picket line in spite of threatening telephone calls, because he was a supporter of democracy.

The conference showed no sympathy with the misgivings of either the Archbishop of Canterbury or the Bishop of Durham. Mr Walker said that the choice between efficiency or compassion, raised by the Archbishop in his interview with *The Times*, was one where the Tory party had constantly sought a balance.



Mr Leon Brittan yesterday: Coal dispute 'an attack on the rule of law itself' (Photograph: John Manning).

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From Julian Haviland, Political Editor.

The Times (London, England), Wednesday, Oct 10, 1984; pg. 1; Issue 61958. (814 words)

Category: News

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Gale Document Number:CS17141578