

Benn calls for general strike

By Julian Haviland and Anthony Bevins

Mr Tony Benn called on the labour movement yesterday to prepare urgently for a general strike, of 24 hours or longer, to protect free trade unionism, political freedom and civil liberties in Britain.

Speaking at a rally in support of striking miners at St Ives, Cambridgeshire, he said no one would contemplate such action unless it became the only alternative to capitulating to a dictatorship. But the Government had mobilized the full apparatus of state power against working people, and there was no guarantee that the attacks would not intensify until the country had passed the point of no return, as in Germany and Italy before the last world war or more recently in Chile.

But Mr Neil Kinnock, the

Labour leader, took an early opportunity of detaching himself from a speech which exasperated most Labour MPs. He said talk of a general strike was idle and a distraction from the main issue.

It enabled newspapers to report the sideshows, with the message about the case for coal not getting through.

Mr Benn, Labour MP for Chesterfield and the longest serving member of Labour's national executive committee, said the Government must be told that the movement was serious.

Mr Benn said workers in great public industries and services were being "bought and sold by speculators as if they were slaves."

A general strike might prove

the only way of reminding the Government "that their class allies, the bankers, industrialists, stockbrokers, judges, editors, chief constables and generals cannot dig coal, manufacture goods, move trains, care for the sick or teach the young".

Mr Kinnock earlier condemned the idea of a general strike at a meeting with Mr Scargill, when he said that such a move would be wounding and even terminally damaging to the campaign for coal. He also believes that picket-line and other strikers' violence equally obstructs the case.

But when he put that point to Mr Scargill, Mr Peter Heathfield and Mr Michael McGahey, the union's leaders, at the Commons yesterday, he was met with blank silence.

Benn calls for general strike.

By Julian Haviland and Anthony Bevins.

The Times (London, England), Friday, Dec 07, 1984; pg. 1; Issue 62006. (349 words)

Category: News

© Times Newspapers Limited

Gale Document Number:CS17403783