



LM
2/2

2 MARSHAM STREET
LONDON SW1P 3EB
01-212 3434

My ref:

Your ref:

1 February 1983

Dear Michael

WATER INDUSTRY PAY DISPUTE - STATEMENT TO HOUSE OF COMMONS

/ I attach a copy of the statement my Secretary of State proposes to make to the House this afternoon on the current situation in the water industry. It is, of course, subject to drafting changes before 3.30 pm.

I am copying this to the Private Secretaries to the Home Secretary, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Leader of the House of Commons, the Paymaster General, the Secretaries of State for Employment, Scotland, Wales and the Chief Press Secretary at No 10.

John
Edmonds

D A EDMONDS
Private Secretary

WATER INDUSTRY PAY DISPUTE - STATEMENT - 1.2.83

With permission, Mr Speaker, I shall make a statement about the industrial action in the water industry.

Since my statement last Monday there has been some increase in the number of people advised to boil water, as a precaution.

This figure is now approximately 5½ million.

About 20,000 properties are without their mains water supply, but arrangements have been or are being made to provide supplies from standpipes or tankers.

Some properties that had lost supplies have been reconnected.

The quality of effluent from some sewage treatment works has deteriorated but so far without serious effects on rivers.

No significant pollution incidents have been reported.

I am glad to tell the House that so far it has been possible to avoid or avert risks to public health.

In my previous statement, I expressed the hope that agreement would be reached that day at a meeting of the water industry national Joint Industrial Council.

I would remind the House that both parties to the dispute agreed a procedure with ACAS for reaching a settlement, involving negotiations under an independent chairman, mediation by the chairman and, in the last resort, arbitration.

An independent mediator was appointed by ACAS.

He made a number of specific recommendations, which were subsequently accepted the employers.

They, therefore, made a further offer, reflecting his recommendations.

They offered an increase of 7.3% to run for 16 months from 5 December 1982 together with an increase in the service supplement for manual employees with more than 5 years service.

The mediator, (in paragraph 8 of his report), suggested further talks about increased earnings opportunities through bonus schemes and greater efficiency.

I have placed in the Library copies of the agreed procedure, together with the mediator's report.

Although the unions has specifically requested mediation and agreed the mediator's terms of reference, they rejected the employers offer based on his recommendations.

On Sunday they announced the continuation of strike action, without any reference to the agreed procedure for the resolution of this dispute, which, as a last resort, provides for arbitration.

ACAS met the employers side yesterday.

There have been further discussions today.

I understand that ACAS is seeing the unions this evening.

Mr Speaker, the whole House will hope that the efforts of ACAS will enable this damaging dispute to be brought to the earliest possible conclusion.

In the meantime, I know that the House will also be anxious to see that the agreements for emergency cover and the avoidance of serious hardship and distress scrupulously observed by those concerned.

Whatever the dispute, there cannot be any justification for actions which hurt those least able to help themselves.

I believe that the basis for an immediate return to work does exist in the recommendations of the mediator.

I hope that this will now be accepted by both sides.

It must be the wish of every Member of this House that this objective is achieved as soon as possible.

Water Industry (Dispute)

3.32 pm

The Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Tom King): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I shall make a statement about the industrial action in the water industry.

Since my statement last Monday there has been some increase in the number of people advised to boil water, as a precaution. This figure is now approximately 5.5 million. About 20,000 properties are without their mains water supply, but arrangements have been or are being made to provide supplies from standpipes or tankers. Some properties that had lost supplies have been reconnected.

The quality of effluent from some sewage treatment works has deteriorated but so far without serious effect on rivers. No significant pollution incidents have been reported. I am glad to tell the House that so far it has been possible to avoid or avert risks to public health.

In my previous statement, I expressed the hope that agreement would be reached that day at a meeting of the Water Industry National Joint Industrial Council.

I remind the house that both parties to the dispute had already agreed a procedure with ACAS for reaching a settlement, involving negotiations under an independent chairman, mediation by the chairman and, in the last resort, arbitration. An independent mediator was appointed by ACAS. He made a number of specific recommendations, which were subsequently accepted by the employers. They, therefore, made a further offer, reflecting his recommendations.

The employers offered an increase of 7.3 per cent. to run for 16 months from 5 December 1982 together with an increase in the service supplement for manual employees with more than five years service. The mediator, in paragraph 8 of his report, suggested further talks about increased earnings opportunities through bonus schemes and greater efficiency.

I have placed in the Library copies of the agreed procedure, together with the mediator's report.

Although the unions specifically requested mediation and agreed the mediator's terms of reference, they rejected the employers' offer based on his recommendations. On Saturday they announced the continuation of strike action, without any reference to the agreed procedure for the resolution of this dispute, which, as a last resort, provides for arbitration.

ACAS met the employers side yesterday. There have been further discussions today. I understand that ACAS is seeing the unions this evening.

The House will hope that the efforts of ACAS will enable this damaging dispute to be brought to the earliest possible conclusion. In the meantime, I know that the House will be anxious to see that the emergency cover continues to be provided and that hardship and distress are not caused. Whatever the dispute, there cannot be any justification for actions which hurt those least able to help themselves.

There are clearly two main options to achieve an end to the dispute and an immediate return to work. Either the mediator's recommendation of urgent discussions on the various ways in which the earnings opportunities of water workers can be improved is pursued further or, if this

course is unacceptable, the terms of the national agreement regarding arbitration should be followed. The way is there. It must be taken.

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Ardwick): I agree with the Secretary of State about the potential exceptional gravity of this dispute and the potential hardship to many millions of our fellow citizens. I agree with him about hardly anything else.

It is not true, as the Secretary of State has claimed, that the employers' offer is based on the mediator's recommendation. It is based on one of the two recommendations in paragraph 9. No offer has been made by the employers on the basis of paragraph 8, which calls for an understanding, positive and determined response to the workers' grievance on comparability. The mediator says in that paragraph:

"I recommend that they now do so as a matter of great urgency."

The unions sent a telex to the employers on Saturday asking for negotiations on the mediator's report. They have had no reply to that urgent communication. Meanwhile, the House has a right to a full report from the Secretary of State on the part that he has been playing in this dispute.

Will the Secretary of State report to the House on his reported secret meeting last Thursday evening with three water council chairmen, including Sir William Dugdale, all of them members of the Conservative party? Will he give the House the facts on his reported attempt to pressure Sir William Dugdale into changing the composition of the negotiating group, including removing the chairman, Mr. Len Hill? Will he explain why Mr. Len Hill was excluded from the meeting last Thursday evening?

Is it not a fact that if the workers had not adhered meticulously to their code of practice the danger to the health of the people of this country would already be one of incalculable gravity and that the insults to them by the Secretary of State, the Secretary of State for Employment and the Prime Minister are doing nothing to help? Will the right hon. Gentleman now ask the employers to respond immediately to the trade unions request for negotiations? The right hon. Gentleman said on television on Sunday:

"We back the judgment of the independent mediator". Will he therefore give a categorical assurance that the employers are free to negotiate on the whole of the mediator's report?

Should not the prime concern—[*Interruption.*] This is a major crisis brought about by the Government. Should not the prime concern of the House be the grave danger to the health of our fellow citizens and to the country's industry? It is the Secretary of State's duty to bring about a speedy and honourable conclusion to the dispute by encouraging urgent negotiations. That is also the duty of the Opposition. If the right hon. Gentleman will not do his duty, we shall do ours.

Mr. King: With great respect, I do not think that the right hon. Gentleman can have listened to my statement. The right hon. Gentleman invites the employers to respond to the recommendations in paragraph 8 of the mediator's report. I have just said that. As the right hon. Gentleman knows, improving the earnings opportunities of water workers by the various methods that I described in my statement is precisely what paragraph 8 is about. Indeed, I concluded my statement by saying that one of the two options that should be pursued was the mediator's

Q3. **Mr. Bidwell** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 1 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Bidwell: Does the right hon. Lady understand that her remarks in this Chamber on the water industry dispute have been exceedingly unhelpful? Taking examples of average earnings is always dodgy, especially if related to the Members of the House. With regard to the right hon. Lady's remarks last Thursday, may I point out that the report of a mediator connected with ACAS is not holy writ, as evidenced by the recent decision of the Department of Defence when the Government turned down a mediator's proposal in the dispute with the Transport and General Workers Union?

The Prime Minister: I am sorry that the facts get in the hon. Gentleman's way, as that is virtually all that I have given him in connection with this dispute.

The hon. Gentleman knows that the agreement between the employers and the employees is that the dispute, if such there be, should go to arbitration before there is industrial action. With regard to this dispute, the water workers wanted mediation and the employers agreed to it. The water workers agreed the name of the mediator, as did the employers. The mediator pronounced, and the employers accepted his decision. We are now awaiting the decision of the water workers.

Mr. Arthur Lewis: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I think that I am correct in saying that on occasions you,

with the Leader of the House and what are known as the usual channels, discuss the procedure of the House. Next time that happens, will you consider the possibility that Privy Councillors should have their own time to put questions to the Prime Minister, and not keep muscling in by taking up two-thirds, if not 90 per cent. of the time which should be for Back Benchers, who take the trouble to table questions? Privy Councillors enter the Chamber just before the Prime Minister gets to her feet.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I always listen with the utmost respect to what the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Lewis) says. I have no doubt that Privy Councillors will do the same.

Mr. Cryer: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Could hon. Members be selected to ask questions during Prime Minister's Question Time on the basis of those whose questions are among the first 10 or 12 on the Order Paper by virtue of random selection? It would work out perfectly fairly and would prevent the invidious accusations that Privy Councillors receive more opportunities than other Members, as we are all elected on an absolutely fair and equal basis.

Mr. Speaker: Order. This gives me an opportunity to say that I shall call a conference of the various parties to consider the outrageous way in which Prime Minister's Question Time is being ruined. I honestly believe that the open question has changed the character of Question Time. I welcome a conference. I shall now call the respective parties to my House to discuss how to get over this.

recommendations for urgent discussions in various ways. The negotiating team, ably led by Mr. Len Hill, chairman of the South West water authority, made it clear publicly, that those recommendations were broadly acceptable. I certainly believe that that is the course that should be pursued.

The right hon. Gentleman seems unable to resist any rumour or smear, no matter how grave the issue before the House. I am glad that he has given me the opportunity to contradict the lie about a secret meeting. I assure the right hon. Gentleman that if I were to hold a secret meeting it would not be held in my Department, during normal working hours, with officials present on both sides and with all the chairmen of the national water authorities who were available in London on that day. I had hoped that Mr. Len Hill would be able to come to the meeting, but as chairman of the South West water authority, and in view of the seriousness of the dispute, he naturally needed to spend some time in his own authority.

The suggestion that I am seeking to replace Mr. Hill as leader of the employers' negotiating team is entirely false. I have considerable respect for his ability and as a negotiator and I am surprised that the right hon. Gentleman should wish to introduce such a totally unjustified and singularly unpleasant smear.

Mr. Kaufman *rose*—

Hon. Members: Withdraw.

Mr. Kaufman: The right hon. Gentleman well knows that for three months he has been putting pressure on the negotiators behind the scenes and that it was his intervention that prevented a settlement towards the end of last year. The information available to us after careful inquiry does not accord with what the Secretary of State has told the House. Mr. Hill did not know that the meeting was taking place. It is most peculiar that the only people available were those who agreed politically with the Secretary of State. It is also interesting that information has come to us that there was resistance by the employers to the replacement of Mr. Len Hill. We certainly agree that Mr. Hill carries—[HON. MEMBERS: "Withdraw."] No, I shall not withdraw. [Interruption.]

Mr. Speaker: Order. We are dealing with a very serious issue. The whole country is anxious about it. Therefore, we should conduct ourselves properly.

Mr. Kaufman: The Secretary of State does not deny that he held that meeting last Thursday. He has not told that House what went on at it, nor has he explained why it was so urgent that only three water authority chairmen were present and time was not made available for the rest of the nine chairmen to attend. I asked for a report on the meeting, but we have received only a series of denials that do not add up.

I repeat my request. Will the Secretary of State now encourage the employers to respond to the workers' request for negotiations which was made three days ago and to which no response has been received?

Mr. King: I am sorry that the right hon. Gentleman has chosen to return to the issue that I hoped that I had dealt with. In relation to the "secret" meeting, I wish to tell the House with the candour and, I hope, the integrity that it would expect of me that the version that I have given to the House is absolutely correct. The reason why Mr. Hill did not know of the meeting was that it was to be a meeting

with my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State. The concerns that arose at that meeting—Sir William Dugdale has put this on record, so I do not mind repeating it—related to the publicity arrangements and whether the water authority chairmen were ensuring that in their own areas adequate publicity was being given to the terms of what we believed was, in the circumstances, a very fair offer and that their side of the argument was being adequately represented. It was not a question that only three people were present at the meeting. At the last minute, when I heard that the chairmen who were available at the time were coming in, I invited them to my office as I wished to join in the discussions.

That is the truth. If the right hon. Gentleman wishes to pursue the slur that there has been any attempt to replace Mr. Len Hill as leader of the negotiating team, he is free to do so, but I hope that he will understand from me—we have crossed swords on other matters and he knows that I value what I consider to be the responsibility of a Minister to the House—that there is no truth whatever in the allegation. I make that clear to the House now. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will not pursue those arguments because there are very serious issues at stake, and I am appalled at the attempt to trivialise the issue with smears and rumours of that kind.

Once again, I have made it quite clear, and I understand clearly from the employers—they have said this to the unions directly—that they are more than ready to enter into urgent discussions on paragraph 8 of the mediator's report. That is what the right hon. Gentleman asked, and that is what they are willing to do.

Mr. Kaufman: First, the Secretary of State has now given two alternative versions of Thursday's meeting, and the two versions are not compatible. Secondly, he has not responded to my request that he now ask the employers to respond to the message sent by the workers on Saturday so that urgent negotiations to resolve the dispute may take place.

Several Hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Speaker: I do not propose to allow the usual length of time on this subject. We have already taken 20 minutes and have heard that talks are continuing tonight. Therefore, I propose to call a few more hon. Members from each side and then move on.

Mr. Tony Durant (Reading, North): Does my right hon. Friend realise that the general public do not understand why, when an independent mediator has been set up and when an agreement has been reached between the industry and the unions, the unions which were party to that agreement will not accept what the mediator has proposed?

Mr. King: It was made clear in Mr. Lowry's letter that, while it was hoped that the mediator's recommendations could be accepted, they were not binding. If that view is taken, I hope that the right hon. Member for Manchester, Ardwick (Mr. Kaufman) will say that, as that was the term of the ACAS understanding, the further term of the ACAS understanding should be observed. If the second part of the agreed procedure is not acceptable to the unions and with some reluctance the employers have realised an obligation to accept it to end the dispute, there is no question but that it is for the unions to pursue the further agreed procedure that is laid down and signed by them with ACAS.

Mrs. Shirley Williams (Crosby): Does the Secretary of State agree that it is overwhelmingly in the national interest that the dispute should be ended as soon as possible and that emergency cover has been an important factor? Does he agree that we should recognise the willingness of at least some water workers to keep that emergency cover going? The Secretary of State will be aware that, rightly or wrongly, there has been some suspicion that he has intervened with the National Water Council in the negotiations. Will he give an assurance that in any recourse to arbitration the Government will not instruct or otherwise intervene with the National Water Council in reaching a conclusion that it believes will bring the dispute to an end?

Mr. King: That obviously concerns the ACAS arrangements. It is a matter for both parties. I hope that there can be agreement about an arbitrator who will have to resolve the problem, if that is the course that the unions wish to take. In either circumstance, under the agreement, there should be an immediate return to work. That is part of the national agreement to which the unions are committed. There have been one or two slight deviations. I hope that the right hon. Lady will agree that it is important for industrial relations that signed agreements are honoured.

Mr. Robert C. Brown (Newcastle upon Tyne, West): Does the Secretary of State agree that the employees in the industry have behaved in an exemplary fashion since the strike began? That being so, does he agree that the Government should do their utmost to encourage the maintenance of that conduct for as long as possible? Does he agree that the Prime Minister, bedecked with diamonds, inferring that they are nothing but a greedy lot of no-goods and the Secretary of State for Employment quoting a rule book when he cannot tell a rule book from a sore thumb do nothing to help to restore the normal tranquility of the industry but inflame already dangerous circumstances?

Mr. King: I do not believe that it will help if I comment on behaviour in the industry. Without question, in some areas there has been good co-operation to meet some difficult problems. In others, I have to say that behaviour has been less good. I hope that the normal processes of mediation and arbitration that are available can be put to good effect so that the public may be protected from what will otherwise become an increasingly unacceptable dispute. I understand from the evidence supplied by an opinion poll carried out by MORI for the National Water Council that the public regard the offer as fair, and think that it does not justify the type of industrial action that is now causing much hardship.

Mr. Robin Squire (Hornchurch): In the light of the hardship that is being caused to an increasing number of people, especially the handicapped and the elderly, will my right hon. Friend say when he considers that the final stage of the procedure that is signed by all parties has been reached? Will he confirm that it was part of that procedure and understanding that, in the event of either party going to arbitration, there would be "an obligation" on the other party to respond to that request?

Mr. King: I understand that the employers have made it clear that if the unions are unable, as they appear to be, to accept the mediator's recommendation and proceed to

the final stage because they are unable to accept the intermediate one, the employers recognise the obligation to accompany them in that reference to arbitration.

Dr. John Cunningham (Whitehaven): Has not the country been brought to this grave circumstance first by the Government reneging on their election promise of free collective bargaining and, secondly, by the right hon. Gentleman's short-sighted and stupid attempt to try to impose a 4 per cent. ceiling on the negotiations and by the even more stupid intervention of the Secretary of State for Employment? Is the Secretary of State now saying that he will agree to the employers returning to the negotiating table to honour the commitment on comparability that was given to the water workers?

Mr. King: The hon. Gentleman has a limited knowledge of the background to the negotiations.

Dr. Cunningham: I have worked in the industry.

Mr. King: Then there is even less excuse for the hon. Gentleman knowing so little about it.

Negotiations about the upper quartile have been proceeding throughout the year. There have already been some five or six meetings about comparability. It has never been promised or conceded. The hon. Gentleman was also wrong because the employers' opening offer was 4 per cent. Because it was unacceptable they went to arbitration. Arbitration was offered on the same day because the claim was difficult. It involves both an adjustment to the annual rate of pay and a complete change in the level in the pay league. Rather than trying to recreate history incorrectly, I hope that the hon. Gentleman will address himself to the serious problem of whether the agreement that has been reached can be offered.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Woolwich, West): Which groups of workers who would be done down if the water workers moved into the upper quartile have consented to that relative movement? Is there any explanation why the leaders of the National Union of Public Employees accepted an offer that is equal to or lower than that which has been offered to the water workers after their efforts on behalf of nurses and public sector employees in the National Health Service which had the sincere support of many hon. Members and much of the country? Has the Thames water authority given any sign whether it will repair mains bursts that occurred before the strike began?

Mr. King: I have not had any information on my hon. Friend's final point. Several mains bursts in London are being repaired. Some of that type of work is normally done by contractors and they have been carrying it out. My hon. Friend's point about the basic change in the earnings league illustrates why the mediator, who has had a better opportunity than any right hon. or hon. Member to assess the suggestion, having heard the unions put their case, was able to make no recommendation. Indeed, he specifically dismissed it. He said that, although there is a grievance about earnings, there are opportunities for earnings to be increased. The employers' point—the mediator agrees—is that increased wages must be earned and cannot be awarded out of the blue.

Mr. Sydney Bidwell (Ealing, Southall): Is the Secretary of State aware that Sir Walter Dugdale, the chairman of the National Water Council, told millions of people on television during the weekend that if the

Government wanted a settlement there would be one? It is as plain as a pikestaff that the argument is about just a little more money which the Government can authorise.

Mr. King: It is not "Sir Walter" it is "Sir William". Nor is that what he said. The fact is—and this came out as plain as a pikestaff, if I may use the hon. Member's phrase—that it is not just a little more money. There is an issue of principle, the issue of the upper quartile. That came out clearly and union members themselves made that clear.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his constructive and informative statement to the House. I share his wish that this damaging dispute should be settled quickly. Is he aware that increasing evidence is coming to the attention of hon. Members that many water workers were not in receipt of ballot papers for the votes that have taken place? Will he therefore discuss with the Secretary of State for Employment whether, far from there being jiggery-pokery on the Government's side, there is a devil of a lot of jiggery-pokery on the union side? I can quote chapter and verse if he wishes.

Mr. King: This widens the issue into areas into which I would rather not proceed today. The way in which the respective ballots, soundings or whatever have been conducted, which will have been noted by many people up and down the country, must be of continuing concern. Undoubtedly others will want to reflect on this.

Mr. Jack Ashley (Stoke-on-Trent, South): As a Member sponsored by the General and Municipal, Boilermakers and Allied Trades Union, may I say that, whatever the outcome of the dispute, the way in which the Government have handled it is a clear warning that they should reconsider their whole attitude to industrial relations when it can provoke and embitter moderate and reasonable workers like the water industry workers?

Mr. King: I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will reflect on what he has said about the way in which the dispute has been handled by the Government. We have encouraged the discussions and the attempts at conciliation at ACAS. We have encouraged mediation and the appointment of an independent mediator. We have made

it clear at all times that under the national agreement arbitration is available. I should have hoped that that would have seemed to the right hon. Gentleman, with his trade union connections, an impeccable approach to a difficult industrial situation.

Mr. John Gorst (Hendon, North): When the strike is over will my right hon. Friend have discussions with the Secretary of State for Employment on an important matter that has been raised, namely, the necessity for alternative arrangements when strikes in essential services affect the lives or safety of the public with a view to changing the law so that people may no longer have immunity when they put at risk lives and safety?

Mr. King: I well understand why my hon. Friend has raised that point. Every right hon. and hon. Member must be gravely concerned about the present situation, with a threat to an essential service. I regret it particularly because there is an agreement which provides for mediation and arbitration to continue. There is no good reason why normal working should not continue while these procedures go forward. It is not acceptable for the life of the country and the lot of elderly people, the sick and the handicapped to be so inconvenienced and distressed as many are.

Mr. Kaufman: Since the one thing that we are all agreed upon, including the right hon. Gentleman and myself, is that this strike is potentially of extreme gravity and must be solved honourably and reasonably on all sides, will the Secretary of State, in view of his continual commendation of the mediator's report, ask the employers to respond directly to the telex from the workers asking for further negotiations so that further negotiations may begin immediately?

Mr. King: I do not know how many times I have to repeat it, but, if the right hon. Gentleman would read the last paragraph of my statement, I hope it will be clear to him that that is precisely what the employers have offered in terms of urgent discussions. That has the full support of the Government. I shall not say any more because I hope that the unions will shortly this afternoon be going to ACAS and that it will be possible to find some way forward in this damaging dispute.

Water Industry (Closed Shop Agreement)

4.4 pm

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Grantham): I beg to ask leave to move the Adjournment of the House, under Standing Order No. 9, for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration, namely, "the operation of a closed shop agreement within the water industry".

Following Labour legislation in the 1950s, the water authorities have introduced a closed shop agreement within the industry. Membership of a designated trade union has been made a condition of employment for new employees; thus, the withdrawal of a union card exposes an employee to dismissal without redress. As a result of what has been said to me over the weekend and subsequently, it is clear that a substantial number of water authority employees in my area would like to accept the mediator's award and return to work, but they fear to exercise that right because they know that if they do so there is a substantial risk that they will be dismissed without compensation.

Such a situation is an intolerable affront to the principles of natural justice for which the House stands. The House should have the opportunity to urge upon unions and employers alike the need to give a formal undertaking that they will not bring about the dismissal of any employee who chooses to return to work and accept the mediator's award.

This matter is specific because, as a result of the closed shop agreement, trade union constituents of mine are being obliged to do that which they do not wish to do. The matter is urgent because, as a result of the trade union closed shop agreement, trade union constituents of mine are suffering severe financial loss. The matter is important because the trade unions, having refused the mediator's award, are subjecting my constituents to severe and prolonged hardship.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member for Grantham (Mr. Hogg) gave me notice before 12 o'clock midday that he would seek leave to move the Adjournment of the House for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that he thinks should have urgent consideration, namely, "the operation of a closed shop agreement within the water industry".

The House has listened with concern to what the hon. Gentleman said, as I have myself, and to the exchanges earlier. However, the House knows that under Standing order No. 9 I am directed to take into account the several factors set out in the order, but to give no reason for my decision.

I have to rule that the hon. Gentleman's submission does not fall within the provisions of the Standing Order and, therefore, I cannot submit his application to the House.

Liverpool, Wavertree (Circulation of Leaflet)

4.8 pm

Mr. Anthony Steen (Liverpool, Wavertree): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker, I should like your guidance on a long-standing convention in the House by which Members of Parliament do not trespass on the constituencies of other Members.

In the past few days a scurrilous leaflet has been circulated in one of the wards of my constituency by the hon. Member for Liverpool, Edge Hill (Mr. Alton). Its distribution has caused considerable consternation to my constituents because it has the insignia of the House of Commons in the right-hand corner, it also has the print of the House of Commons on the right-hand side and it infers that the hon. Member for Edge Hill is servicing and representing my constituents. In the final paragraph of his leaflet he says:

"Now that the Mossley Hill Liberal Association has adopted me as their Prospective Parliamentary Candidate, I look forward to extending the service to the area coming into the constituency. Please remember that if I ever can be of service to you, or if you would like to help the Liberal campaign, you shouldn't hesitate to get in touch. You can write to me at the House of Commons".

I ask for your protection, Mr. Speaker, from one Member who is trespassing into the constituency of another.

Mr. David Alton (Liverpool, Edge Hill): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. May I make it clear to you and the House that before issuing the leaflet I consulted my hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith), the chief whip of the Liberal party? He made it clear to me that a Committee of the House had considered the use of the emblem that is shown on the leaflet, which is not the insignia of the House of Commons, and found that it was in order to use it. Furthermore, I made it clear in the letter, while the Boundary Commission is still sitting, that the Mossley Hill Liberal association has just been formed, and in future I would hope for the support of the people in that area if I were ever to be chosen as a candidate there.

It is proper and in order for any person to seek selection as a prospective candidate.

Mr. Arthur Lewis (Newham, North-West): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I shall give a ruling in a moment. I will call the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Alton: Surely it is the right of any citizen to seek your protection, Mr. Speaker, to have the right of free speech and to make it clear that he has an alternative point of view to put to others. I do not seek to interfere in the work of the hon. Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Mr. Steen) while the Wavertree constituency exists. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is capable of discharging his duties in that respect. It is made clear in the leaflet that the largest component part of the new Mossley Hill constituency is my own Edge Hill constituency. That is the truth. [HON. MEMBERS: "Election expenses".] There is no question of election expenses being—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh".] My position is identical to that of the hon. Member for Liverpool, Garston (Mr. Thornton), who was recently chosen as prospective candidate for the seat of my right hon. Friend the Member for Crosby (Mrs. Williams).