

Prime Minister: 2

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This is clearly going to be a major issue <sup>next</sup> ~~two~~ seman

ACID DEPOSITION

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26/10

The Prime Minister may be interested to see the attached Hansard extract of Environment Questions on Wednesday.

There was clearly much concern on all sides of the House about the apparent lack of immediate Government action to tackle the problem of acid deposition, as well as interest in the timing and nature of the response to the Select Committee's report.

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26 October 1984

**The Minister for Local Government (Mr. Kenneth Baker):** No.

**Mr. Pike:** Does the Minister recognise that ever since his Government were elected their actions have severely restricted the freedoms of local government? Is it not time that more power was given back to local government? Would it not be appropriate in such a review to introduce organic change and allow certain services to be given back to borough councils, which are closer to the people whom they represent? I have in mind, for example, social services, which would be more appropriately tied up with the housing service.

**Mr. Baker:** The hon. Gentleman has made the point that my right hon. Friend made about the abolition of the metropolitan counties. The Government are very much in favour of the devolution of services to local authorities. As my hon. Friend the Member for Grantham (Mr. Hogg) indicated, that is the thrust of our policy. I appreciate that Burnley used to be a county borough and that it had a greater degree of independence in the past. But I think that the effect of the distribution of functions between the upper and lower tiers in the county councils which we are abolishing is that the senior partners will be the London boroughs and the metropolitan districts.

### Acid Deposition

3. **Mr. Allan Roberts** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment what recent representations he has received on acid deposition; and if he will make a statement.

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. William Waldegrave):** In the last three months, my right hon. Friend has received about 40 representations about the effects of acid deposition. We have also, of course, recently received the Environment Select Committee's report on this subject, to which the Government's response will be published shortly.

**Mr. Roberts:** Will the Minister undertake to publish that response as quickly as possible and ensure that there is a full debate on the report of the Select Committee in the House, as it is obvious from the evidence that the Select Committee received that the problem is extremely urgent? Damage is now occurring to the British environment as a result of sulphur and nitrogen emissions. We should be warned clearly in advance by the damage to forests and lakes in central Europe and Scandinavia.

**Mr. Waldegrave:** The answer to the first part of the hon. Gentleman's supplementary question is yes. The second part is not for me, but I shall report it to those who are responsible for such matters.

**Mr. Forman:** Although it may be necessary to press ahead with further scientific research into this serious problem, may I ask whether my hon. Friend and his Department accept that there is a strong argument for pursuing in parallel the imposition of special equipment in some power stations on a pilot basis to ascertain whether the practical effect would be to limit this harmful pollution?

**Mr. Waldegrave:** That was one of the recommendations of the Royal Commission to which the Government will be responding. It is worth remembering that Britain has made a major contribution already. That fact is

sometimes forgotten. From the peak of our deposition we have achieved a diminution of nearly 40 per cent., which is more than can be said for any other country.

**Mr. Alton:** When does the Minister expect to respond to the reports of Royal Commission and of the Select Committee? When do the Government expect to be able to comply with the EEC directive on emission control? Will grants be made available to the ecclesiastical authorities in view of the damage which is being caused to many of our churches by acid deposition?

**Mr. Waldegrave:** There will be no unnecessary delay in response to the reports of the Royal Commission and of the Select Committee. The negotiations on the large plant directive have only just started. The British Government, and many other countries, have serious reservations about the target figures for sulphur and nitrogen that appear in the draft proposals.

**Mr. Chapman:** If the Government are shortly to make a response to the Select Committee's report, will my hon. Friend confirm that the Committee's recommendation, that new motor vehicles should be designed so that there is a 40 per cent. reduction in nitrogen oxide emissions, is both a feasible and practical step to take?

**Mr. Waldegrave:** Without pre-empting the response to the Select Committee's report, the Government have made no secret of their view that the lean-burn engine, the route recommended by the Select Committee, is the sensible way to proceed.

**Dr. David Clark:** In the light of the Select Committee's report, the Royal Commission's report and growing public concern on this issue, will the Minister face his international and national responsibilities and instigate immediate action, and, in addition, set up a national inquiry into the effect of acidic emission in both urban and rural environments?

**Mr. Waldegrave:** With respect to the hon. Gentleman, calls for immediate action and inquiries are perhaps the easy part of the response. The British contribution to diminishing the output of acid emission into the atmosphere has been considerable. I do not agree with Labour Members that the reduction is the result of the recession. Fuel substitution and fuel economy have played a major part in the diminution. We should not rush into action without taking a careful view of the costs and benefits involved.

### Wytch Farm

4. **Mr. Kirkwood** asked the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the environmental implications of the proposed development of the onshore oilfield at Wytch farm.

**Mr. Kenneth Baker:** I understand that BP's proposals at Wytch Farm are currently subject to consultation with interested parties, and a planning application is expected in due course. I am well aware of the sensitive environmental issues raised by these proposals, and would expect any application to be subject to rigorous scrutiny by Dorset county council in the first instance.

**Mr. Kirkwood:** I appreciate the national importance of the sensitive ecological site at Wytch Farm, but will the Minister use his good offices to require British Petroleum,