

Industrial Hereditaments) Regulations 1984 (S.I., 1984 No. 221), dated 28th February 1984, a copy of which was laid before this House on 8th March, be annulled.]

Will my right hon. Friend try to find time next week or the week after to debate that matter, bearing in mind that the order will come into effect on 31 March? There are Conservative Members who do not consider that the order, which extends wide-ranging relief to industrial premises, achieves our manifesto commitment.

Mr. Biffen: I shall look at the point that my hon. Friend raises but I do not want him to be too optimistic.

Mrs. Renée Short (Wolverhampton, North-East): Is the Leader of the House aware that the Select Committee's report on the Griffiths proposals is published today? As the Secretary of State for Social Services has expressed the wish that there should be a debate in the House as early as possible, will he bear that in mind and see whether it is possible to have such a debate before the Easter recess?

Mr. Biffen: I am happy to reaffirm that I regard it as an important topic. I can make no promises but I shall certainly consider the matter sympathetically.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): Since our accession to the European Community was a major constitutional issue, confirmed later by referendum, which is limited in its financial implications to the 1 per cent. VAT ceiling, if, at a later stage that were to be increased, that would again have major implications for our constitution and sovereignty. Does my right hon. Friend agree that in those circumstances it is important that the matter should be fully debated and that primary legislation should be brought before the House?

Mr. Biffen: The most prudent thing that I can say at this stage is that it would be foolish for me to try to anticipate the outcome of the European Council meeting.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): The Leader of the House will have seen early-day motion 578 entitled "Parliamentary Inquiries and Use of Select Committees". He will be aware that a number of hon. Members have withdrawn from the Register of Members' Interests in protest at the recent remarks of the chairman of the Select Committee. Will he tell the House where the Select Committee now is in regard to the formal complaints which have been made regarding the Prime Minister's involvement with and knowledge of her son's business interests?

[That this House notes that the Select Committee on Members' Interests has been considering formal complaints alleging the Prime Minister's failure to declare and to register her interests in relation to the Cementation contract in Oman; and believes that the House should use its committees to clear the matter up and end public speculation.]

Mr. Biffen: I understand that the Select Committee on Members' Interests is meeting this afternoon, and our Order Paper informs us of that fact. I am sure that the whole House will be concerned to have an early report from the Committee.

Dr. Alan Glyn (Windsor and Maidenhead): Will the Leader of the House consider extending the length of the foreign affairs debate, as we are to have only one day's debate on subjects that are very far-ranging at this time?

Mr. Biffen: I shall certainly look at that proposition.

Mr. Eddie Loyden (Liverpool, Garston): As the situation in Liverpool at the moment should be of great concern to the right hon. Gentleman and to the Government, will he arrange in the very near future for a debate on the Floor of the House in order that this matter can be discussed fully?

Mr. Biffen: Certainly no provision has been made for next week, but I shall draw the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment to the point that has just been made.

Mr. Nicholas Budgen (Wolverhampton, South-West): Will my right hon. Friend agree that, if the Government apply for an increase in the own resources of the EEC, they should honour the undertaking given by my right hon. Friend Lord Whitelaw on 24 November 1977 that this should be done only by Act of Parliament?

Mr. Biffen: As we are not yet at that ditch, I am not prepared to jump.

Mr. Gavin Strang (Edinburgh, East): Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that it is quite unprecedented and disgraceful for the debate on the common agricultural policy annual price proposals to take place after 10 o'clock? Is he aware that for over 10 years that debate has been the one day's debate on the agricultural industry generally and that to have it after 10 o'clock is not only unacceptable to the House but an insult of the hundreds of thousands of people who earn their living in the agricultural and food industries?

Mr. Biffen: I appreciate the feeling with which the hon. Gentleman speaks. I am not sure that what is now being proposed is wholly without precedent. I have to take account of the very considerable interest there is in the House that we should have a foreign affairs debate, and we simply have to proceed along the lines that I have indicated.

Mr. John Browne (Winchester): Will my right hon. Friend accept that there is a growing use of space for both active and passive military purposes, which is leading to growing concern among a large number of people? Please may we have a debate on this subject so as to prevent the unnecessary proliferation of active military uses of space?

Mr. Biffen: I think that that is a campaign which my hon. Friend can best further by himself seeking an Adjournment debate.

Mr. Doug Hoyle (Warrington, North): Has the right hon. Gentleman seen early-day motion 560 on hare coursing? It is signed by 68 right hon. and hon. Members and calls for the introduction of a Bill to bring to an end this barbaric sport? Will he allow time for it to be debated, because the majority of the population want that to be done as quickly as possible?

[That this House calls for the reintroduction of the Hare Coursing Bill and for the Government to provide Parliamentary time in order to bring to an end this barbaric sport as quickly as possible.]

Mr. Biffen: Any legislation on this topic should probably proceed, but through the normal disciplines of private Member's time.

Mr. Peter Bruinvels (Leicester, East): Is my right hon. Friend aware of the serious disquiet felt regarding the

[Mr. Peter Bruinvels]

Lion intoximeter 3000, as reported in the *Daily Express*? Will he provide time for an urgent debate on the subject, since the machine seems to be completely unreliable?

Mr. Biffen: I wish my hon. Friend every success in the Adjournment debate that I know he will now seek.

Mr. Robert Parry (Liverpool, Riverside): Will the Leader of the House ask his right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer to consider the substantial loss of earnings by British seamen caused by his Budget proposal to phase out tax relief on overseas earnings? Is it not scandalous that seamen who have to work all over the world to earn their living should be bracketed with the very rich who spend most of their lives on world cruises?

Mr. Biffen: The problem of seamen's earnings could well be referred to either later today or on Monday, when there will be debates on Budget proposals.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Following on what the leader of the Social Democratic party said on the allocation of Supply days, will the Leader of the House take into account the fact that there might be an opportunity if the leader of the SDP joined with the leader of the Liberals to decide on a debate in which the House could discuss why, although there is supposed to be joint selection, in the London, South-East constituency there is a Liberal and a Socialist—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am sorry to keep on stopping the hon. Gentleman, but the Leader of the House is not responsible for that matter.

Mr. Skinner: I have not got to my point.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Leader of the House is not responsible for negotiations or talks that go on elsewhere.

Mr. Skinner: It is a debate.

Mr. Speaker: Order. If the hon. Gentleman will put a question—

Mr. Skinner: I have done.

Mr. Speaker: A question about the business next week.

Mr. Skinner: If the Leader of the House cannot arrange such a debate next week—or any other week for that matter—will he take into account the fact that it will be difficult to arrange a Supply day on the night when the Leader of the SDP has a dinner arranged at £27.50 plus VAT?

Mr. Speaker: Does the Leader of the House wish to answer?

Mr. Biffen: Clearly, it is not a take-away dinner. Like most other topics for debate, it seems highly suitable for the Adjournment, and I can think of no better Member to raise it than the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner).

Collieries (Picketing)

3.46 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Leon Brittan): I will with permission, Mr. Speaker, make a statement about the picketing that has taken place at collieries in various parts of the country in the last few days.

The legal position is clear. Any attempt to obstruct or intimidate those who wish to go to work is a breach of the criminal law. The mere presence of large numbers of pickets can be intimidating. The police have the duty to prevent obstruction and intimidation, and enable those who wish to go to work to do so. They have the power to stop and disperse large numbers of pickets, and to take preventive action by stopping vehicles and people.

Picketing has been taking place in Durham, Leicestershire, Derbyshire, west Yorkshire, south Yorkshire, Lancashire and Wales. In those areas, the police have been able to ensure that those who wish to go to work are not physically prevented from doing so. The presence of pickets has, however, led to many miners feeling unable to go to work. Overall, 83 pits were working normally at the beginning of the week. Only 29 were doing so this morning.

There has, however, been substantial mass picketing in the Nottinghamshire area, and serious disturbances as a result. The police have been responding to this firmly. At any one time more than 3,000 police officers, from a total of 17 forces, in addition to the Nottinghamshire constabulary, are on hand. Of the 25 pits in the National Coal Board's Nottinghamshire area, seven today have been working normally; eight have been working at reduced capacity; seven have been open, but have had too few miners available to send men underground; three have not been working.

The most serious disturbances have been at Ollerton. The police estimate that as many as 500 pickets were present there last night and during the night a total of more than 200 officers were deployed. It was at Ollerton that a miner from Yorkshire, Mr. David Jones, died. I understand that a post mortem has been carried out, and that he died as a result of injuries to his chest. The House will wish to express its deep regret that this has happened. Although there is no reason to suppose that the police were involved in any way, the chief constable has decided in the circumstances that it would be desirable to have the case investigated by a senior police officer from a force not involved in providing support in Nottinghamshire. The House will understand that, in the circumstances, it would be inappropriate for me to comment in more detail on that incident.

Following the death of Mr. Jones, local management at Ollerton decided to end the night shift, all of whom had attended for work normally and the pickets moved away to other places. During events in Nottinghamshire yesterday, 10 arrests were made, and by the end of this morning some 33 arrests had been made since midnight.

I need hardly underline the seriousness of this situation. The law permits picketing for the purpose of peacefully communicating and persuading. What it does not permit is what some of the Nottinghamshire miners themselves, who have been the victims of disgraceful conduct, have called mob rule, and what is so horrifying is that it is mob rule that is being inflicted by miner upon fellow miner.

Miners have the right to take part in a free ballot. In north Wales, Warwickshire and Staffordshire yesterday, they conducted a ballot to determine whether or not they will take strike action. The ballot starts in the Nottinghamshire coalfield today at 6 pm and is open for 24 hours. That ballot will be protected, and will go ahead.

A major co-ordinated police response, involving police officers from throughout the country, has been deployed to ensure that any miner who wishes to work at any pit may do so and any miner who wishes to vote may do so. I have made it clear to the chief constables concerned that they have my complete support in taking every measure open to them within the law to keep the peace and protect the right to work and to vote. The objective of the police is to prevent intimidation, obstruction and other criminal offences. They have mobilised every available officer in order to disperse excessive numbers of pickets. The police have extensive preventive powers under the common law, including, for example, the power to stop coaches, cars and people on foot who are clearly intent upon joining mass picketing which has become intimidatory, either because of the risk or threat of violence or simply because of the sheer numbers involved.

The House may have heard of an agreement recently announced between Mr. Chadburn and Mr. Arthur Scargill, which may lead to the withdrawal of Yorkshire pickets from Nottinghamshire. It does not, of course, affect in any way what I have said about the policy of the Government, the duties of the police, or the rights of the citizen under the law throughout the country. I have asked Sir Lawrence Byford, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Constabulary, to keep in close touch with the chief constables of the areas concerned. He has left for Nottinghamshire in the first place, and will report personally to me later today.

I look to the whole House to condemn unreservedly any attempt to force miners not to work if they wish to do so, or to intimidate them from voting freely in the ballots now taking place. The right of miners who want to work and vote is something that is fundamental to a free society. The police are currently doing everything in their power to uphold that right. In doing so, they will have the fullest support of the Government and, I am confident, of the House.

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): First, on behalf of my right hon. and hon. Friends, I wish to express our sorrow at the death of Mr. David Jones, and to offer our sympathy to his wife and family in their sad and untimely bereavement.

We in the Labour party condemn all violence in all circumstances, and that includes condemnation of violence in pursuit of industrial disputes, even when it occurs among people who feel impotent in the face of the destruction of their jobs, their industries and their communities.

It is the duty of the Home Secretary, above all other Ministers, to seek to maintain the Queen's peace, yet he seems to regard it as his function to stir up difficult situations, instead of seeking to cool them down. He did that during the Warrington *Messenger* dispute. He did it again following the incidents involving Mr. Ian MacGregor when, in search of party advantage, he repudiated his own Minister of State's honest statement of the facts. He has done it again today in a statement that goes far outside his departmental responsibilities as Home

Secretary, and it is deliberately calculated to inflame a situation that requires conciliation. We all know that it is the Prime Minister who has put him up to it. *[Interruption.]* The fact is that it is this Government who are directly responsible for this lamentable situation, first, by forcing on to the statute book legislation deliberately calculated to inflame delicate industrial problems, and, secondly, by appointing Mr. MacGregor to carve up the coal industry. When the Government did both these things, they must have known what would happen. They may even have hoped for it to happen. *[Interruption.]* They have a vested interest in provoking industrial anarchy. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Ray Powell (Ogmore): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Can we not stop the noise of the rabble on the Government Front Bench?

Mr. Speaker: Order. I must say that it does not come from one side of the House only. Whatever is said from the Dispatch Box can frequently be somewhat difficult to listen to, but I think we should listen in silence to what the right hon. Gentleman has to say.

Mr. Kaufman: The fact is that this Government have a vested interest in provoking industrial anarchy. Only a few days ago, the Select Committee on Energy criticised Mr. MacGregor directly for his approach to the creation of redundancies. The fact is that the chairman of the National Coal board is seeking to implement a unilateral closure plan without any proper consultation with the National Union of Mineworkers. The Government should now intervene by acting to bring the parties together so that a sensible plan can be worked out for the industry producing this most precious and essential fuel.

The Home Secretary has just asked the House to condemn unreservedly any attempt to force miners not to work, if they wish to do so. It is the Government's policies that are condemning not only miners, but 3 million others, not to work when they wish to do so.

Mr. Ivor Stanbrook (Orpington): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I know that a certain latitude is allowed to Opposition Front-Bench Members, but is not a statement an occasion when questions should be asked about it, rather than a counter-statement lasting almost as long as the original statement?

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member is quite right; latitude is given to the Front Bench, but I think that the right hon. Gentleman is coming to his last page. [HON. MEMBERS: "Page?"]

Mr. Kaufman: That is true, Mr. Speaker. As always, you anticipated correctly what I was going to do.

The person responsible for this sorry situation is the Prime Minister. [HON. MEMBERS: "Question."] It is she — [HON. MEMBERS: "Question."] It is she who appointed Mr. MacGregor to butcher the coal industry. It is she — [HON. MEMBERS: "Question."] It is she who has ordered the Home Secretary to make this provocative statement today. It is she who said, "Where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is despair, let me sow hope." The Prime Minister has sown hatred and despair. [HON. MEMBERS: "Question."] I hope that she is satisfied with what she has done. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Brittan rose — *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I ask the House, in a very highly charged situation, to conduct our discussions here in calmness.

Mr. Cyril D. Townsend (Bexleyheath): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Surely we are going way beyond the normal conventions? A statement has been made from the Opposition Front Bench. Is not the whole point of questioning by the Opposition to elucidate the statement made by the Home Secretary, not to make a highly flamboyant statement in such situations?

Mr. Speaker: I repeat to the House that this is a highly charged situation, inside and outside the House. I think that in the House we must today give a lead to the rest of the country.

Mr. Brittan: The right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) began what purported to be his questions on my statement with a condemnation of violence whatever its cause or source may be. Every single word that he uttered after that showed that that condemnation was no more than a ritual wringing of hands. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] The right hon. Gentleman had the effrontery to accuse me of stirring up incidents and of going beyond my departmental responsibility when I stated the facts, stated the law and stated my support for the police in upholding the law. The House will judge who is going beyond his responsibilities and who is unworthy of the office to which he aspires.

Mr. Jim Lester (Broxtowe): I say on behalf of the Nottinghamshire miners in my constituency, who are both responsible and democratic, that they feel closer to what my right hon. and learned Friend said than to the statements of others—

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Question.

Mr. Lester —as they seek merely the right freely to vote on issues that they understand far better than anyone from Manchester.

Mr. Brittan: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for what he has said. Those who know him will be aware that he did not utter those remarks lightly and that what he says represents the views of his constituents.

Mr. J. D. Concannon (Mansfield): Is the Home Secretary aware that I would have preferred him not to make a statement today against the background of the highly charged atmosphere in Nottinghamshire, including my constituency? I appeal to all right hon. and hon. Members to recognise that an agreement has been made and that there will be a ballot in Nottinghamshire during the rest of today and tomorrow, which will be assessed on Sunday morning. The time to talk will be after the result of the ballot is announced on Sunday morning. I hope that the House will kindly belt up. I shall have to return to a highly charged atmosphere in Nottinghamshire, especially Mansfield, which is doing no one any good, least of all the National Union of Mineworkers.

Mr. Brittan: I am sure that the House will respect the right hon. Gentleman's desire that the ballot should go ahead peacefully, and that is exactly what we are seeking to ensure. However, after the events of yesterday, which are fortunately still rare in our national affairs, the House would have judged me to have failed in my duty if I had not made a statement on what had happened.

Mr. Eldon Griffiths (Bury St. Edmonds): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that one of the most difficult tasks of the police is to strike a balance between enforcing the law to enable people to vote and to work freely, and upholding the Queen's peace, which quite frequently requires them to use minimum force, thereby avoiding any unnecessary escalation of violence? Will he tell the House that it does not assist the police in striking that balance, which they do better than any other police force in the world, if there are inflammatory remarks in this place which can make their job only much more difficult?

Mr. Brittan: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend that inflammatory remarks do not help the police in the discharge of their duty.

Mr. Kaufman *indicated assent.*

Mr. Alexander Eadie (Midlothian): I hope that the Home Secretary will reflect on his statement, which on any description was not helpful in easing what my right hon. Friend the Member for Mansfield (Mr. Concannon) has described as a difficult and inflammatory situation. Why did the right hon. and learned Gentleman not place more emphasis on the agreement that has been made between Nottingham and Yorkshire that the violence, or the picketing, should end? Does he agree that a voluntary agreement is far better than violence or reaction?

Mr. Brittan: I referred to the agreement that the hon. Gentleman has mentioned. However, when events of his sort occur, I consider it my duty to make it clear that the police have the resources and the support to enable the law to be enforced. It would be a sad day for Britain if it should be regarded as matter of controversy to suggest that people should be able to go to work if they want to do so.

Sir John Osborn (Sheffield, Hallam): Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that as the only Conservative Member in south Yorkshire I should welcome an agreement between the miners of Nottingham and south Yorkshire? But is it not a fact that the intimidation and the consequences of intimidation may influence the ballot one way or the other? Miners have been subject to the flying picket and the brutality that goes with it, which could influence their decisions in future. Can my right hon. and learned Friend assure me that flying pickets have now ceased their activities throughout the country, especially when 30 or 40 of them use a private vehicles to arrive at the pithead at short notice? That is something that miners fear.

Mr. Brittan: I fully understand my hon. Friend's anxiety that the ballot should be a genuinely free one. It is precisely to stress that and to seek to ensure it that I have made a statement outlining the powers of the police and their readiness to enforce them for the purpose that my hon. Friend has in mind. I cannot give my hon. Friend the assurance that nowhere in the country will there be flying pickets, for that is not within my gift. However, I can give him the assurance that everyone involved is well aware of what his duty is in the maintenance of law and order and will have my support in carrying out that duty.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): Is the Home Secretary aware that in Northumberland, to which he did not refer, many pickets came from the Durham area to picket collieries such as Ellington, which voted overwhelmingly against striking, and suggested that if

miners continued to report for work many more pickets would shortly arrive? Does he recognise that this is intimidatory action that prevents those who want to work from going to work, and action that prevents a pithead ballot from taking place? Does he think that Mr. Scargill, or the occupants of the Opposition Front Bench, have recognised that if they want to save jobs in the coal industry they must seek to win the argument with the public and not bring fear and violence to miners and their families?

Mr. Brittan: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for supplementing the facts that I presented to the House. He has underlined the importance and the necessity of taking the action that has been taken to protect the rights of individuals to work and to vote.

Mr. Andy Stewart (Sherwood): I thank my right hon. and learned Friend for his statement, bearing in mind the difficult conditions and the deplorable situation which arose yesterday evening in my constituency. I was there for the early part of last night and it was a deplorable scene. My constituents want to know whether they will have the protection of the law in going to work next week if they decide not to strike.

Mr. Brittan: They will have every protection that the forces of law are capable of giving.

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): Did the Home Secretary hear the Prime Minister say a short while ago that the miners want to work? Is he aware that just for once the right hon. Lady is right and that miners throughout the country are fighting for the right to work? If he wants to use the forces of law to ensure that people can go to their work, when will he initiate prosecutions against Mr. MacGregor and the man sitting beside him, the Secretary of State for Energy?

Mr. Brittan: If the hon. Gentleman is serious about prosecutions, no doubt he will refer them to the relevant prosecuting authorities.

Mr. Timothy Yeo (Suffolk, South): Has my right hon. and learned Friend had time to note the statement made by the general secretary of the TUC this afternoon, roundly condemning the violence that has taken place in the coal mines? Does he share my concern that no such condemnation has yet come from the president of the National Union of Mineworkers or the Opposition Front Bench? As it appears that over the past two or three days intimidation has affected the outcome of the ballot that is due to take place in certain coal fields, will my right hon. and learned Friend make a further statement next week about steps to be taken to prevent similar occurrences in future?

Mr. Brittan: Every statement condemning violence, especially from such a prominent source as the one to which my hon. Friend referred, is extremely welcome. Everyone must make his own decision on what his conscience causes him to do and not to do.

Mr. Neil Kinnock (Islwyn): You do that.

Mr. Brittan: As for the future, we must concentrate on ensuring that a free ballot takes place. We shall watch the situation as it develops.

Mr. Bob Clay (Sunderland, North): Does the Home Secretary accept that, every time a group of workers show

some signs of being able to protect themselves against the attacks made by the Government, the Home Secretary turns that into a law and order issue? Although he has been successful to some degree in that tactic up to now, will he accept that he and the Government are taking on, certainly in my constituency and in the Durham area generally, people who will become more and more determined to save their jobs and their livelihood in that coalfield, and that that determination will increase the more that he and his colleagues attack them?

Mr. Brittan: It is not a question of tactics. I do not see how the hon. Gentleman can talk about people protecting themselves when what he is describing is large numbers of people assembling, with the inevitable threat of disorder flowing from those numbers, for the express purpose of trying to prevent their fellow workers going to work when they want to do so.

Mr. David Ashby (Leicestershire, North-West): Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that in my area of north-west Leicestershire, where we have already suffered perhaps the greatest number of pit closures of any area in the United Kingdom, the miners are most anxious to continue working? Is my right hon. and learned Friend prepared to give them added protection so that they can beat the bully boys of Kent?

Mr. Brittan: The whole tenor of my statement has shown my desire that those who want to work have the right to work and will have the protection that the law can provide.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): What discussions or consultations took place between the NCB and the Government before the NCB sought an injunction earlier this week, which in the view of many with long experience in the mining industry, was provocative and counter-productive and played no small part in the substance of the Home Secretary's statement?

Mr. Brittan: The answer to the question is none. It is completely irrelevant to my statement. What was occurring that led to the statement being made began long before an injunction was made.

Mr. Ivor Stanbrook (Orpington): Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that, despite what he said, there were many cases, some of them shown on television yesterday, in which the police failed to prevent violence being done to those who wished to work? Before there are any further mass pickets such as this, will he kindly ensure that there are adequate police and that they do their duty fully?

Mr. Brittan: In a situation such as that which we have seen, it is impossible to prevent every act of violence. It is our duty to make sure that the police have the forces, the strength, the support and the powers to do everything within their grasp to secure people the right to go to work and vote. That is what I shall make sure that they do.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Is the Home Secretary aware that, when David Jones and his mates went into the Nottinghamshire coalfield, they were fighting to save the jobs of workers at Cortonwood, a pit that was threatened with closure within a few weeks of accepting men from another doomed pit? Does he not have a cheek to talk about trade union democracy when the Government removed the freedom and liberty of trade unionists at GCHQ, and have handed over trade union rule to the High Court judges—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must stick to the question.

Mr. Skinner: This happens every time I speak.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman gets on to the point and gets off it again.

Mr. Skinner: No.

Mr. Speaker: Yes.

Mr. Skinner: No.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am not prepared to have an argument about it. We must hear the answer.

Mr. Brittan: I understand the hon. Gentleman's difficulty and I sympathise with him—

Mr. Skinner: How can I be out of order when I have been asking questions?

Mr. Brittan: It cannot be agreeable for any of us, particularly the hon. Gentleman, to see one set of people in the industry physically facing, in a violent way, another set of people in the same industry. That is a matter of regret and to be deplored; the right way to determine these matters is in the normal democratic procedure that we are seeking to make possible.

Mrs. Elizabeth Peacock (Batley and Spen): I welcome my right hon. and learned Friend's statement wholeheartedly. Does he not agree that not only the miners are intimidated by flying pickets, but their wives and children as well, and that the wives and children fear not only for themselves but for their menfolk?

Mr. Brittan: I agree with that entirely.

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): Is the right hon. and learned Gentleman aware of the charge being made against him—that, having employed Mr. MacGregor to destroy the right to work in the steel industry, having destroyed the right of those in Cheltenham to vote on trade union membership, and now having released Mr. MacGregor to destroy the right to work of 20,000 miners, what he said was insensitive, provocative, odious and hypocritical and that he should accept responsibility for everything that is happening in the coalfields?

Mr. Brittan: Faced with the facts that Mr. MacGregor is investing twice as much as the right hon. Gentleman did, and that pit closures were proceeding at a far faster rate under the previous Labour Government than under the present Government, I do not think that it lies in the right hon. Gentleman's mouth to make such accusations.

Mr. John Powley (Norwich, South): Would my right hon. and learned Friend agree that the overwhelming majority of ordinary people find repugnant the activities that they have seen on their television screens connected with these disputes, and they know that the only Government on which they can rely to uphold and maintain law and order are the present Government?

Mr. Brittan: I agree with my hon. Friend's first observation. That is why the people are looking to this House to give a lead and to reflect what they feel by condemning violence and ensuring the right of people freely to go about their business.

Mr. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk, West): Is it not a clear case of double standards for the Prime Minister, or any

Minister to criticise the NUM for using mass picketing to stop people from going to work when the Government have used the violent weapon of mass unemployment to stop over 3 million people going to their work and to intimidate whatever work force is left, and the same Government have provoked the dispute by appointing Ian MacGregor to preside over more pit closures that will stop even more people going to their work?

Mr. Brittan: The hon. Gentleman is being most unfair to the NUM. It is not the NUM that is stopping people from going to work but one part of the NUM trying to stop another part.

Mr. Skinner: There was a majority for a strike on day one.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Skinner: Well, I am not allowed to say it when I stand up.

Mr. Tony Favell (Stockport): Would my right hon. and learned Friend agree that one of the best ways to defuse this ugly situation would be for Labour Members to recommend the NUM to hold a national ballot?

Mr. Brittan: That goes beyond my statement, but Opposition Members will have heard my hon. Friend's suggestion.

Mr. Allen McKay (Barnsley, West and Penistone): Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman tell the House the number of pits where violence has occurred and the number of pits that were picketed with no violence, as opposed to those that he has highlighted. Is he aware that in my constituency, to which the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) referred, miners were transferred but a few weeks before to the Cortonwood colliery when another closed, and set the whole situation going?

Mr. Skinner: Thank you.

Mr. Brittan: I have said where the most serious incidents occurred and I have told the House what was going on in other parts of the country. I am not presenting a picture of violence throughout the country. I have been concise in what I have said. However, I am saying that even in those areas where people were not physically prevented from going to work, overall, 83 pits were working normally at the beginning of the week and only 29 were doing so this morning. The House will draw its own conclusions.

Mr. Francis Maude (Warwickshire, North): Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that in Warwickshire coalfield, where a free ballot has already taken place, there is great anxiety that the flying pickets should be kept out of the area and not allowed to the pit gates at all?

Mr. Brittan: I can understand that anxiety.

Mr. Ray Powell (Ogmore): Can the right hon. and learned Gentleman assure the House that there will not be the violence from the police that I experienced in my youth in the Rhondda valley, and make sure that the strikers and the pickets are protected by the law?

Mr. Brittan: The police will carry out their duties in accordance with the law, which involves not using violence unless they are attacked. If they are attacked, they will defend themselves.

Several Hon. Members rose—