

Emergency debate on police operation

COAL STRIKE

The House of Commons will spend three hours tomorrow (Tuesday) in an emergency debate on the implications for civil liberties and the rule of law of policing operations connected with the miners' dispute.

The Speaker (Mr Bernard Weatherill) allowed the debate following an application by Mr Allen McKay (Barnsley West and Penistone, Lab). It will take precedence over the second reading of the Finance Bill which will be taken later in the evening.

Mr McKay said the debate was not intended for attacking the police.

Irrespective of what Conservative MPs may think (he said), my own relationship with the police force is extremely good. I am sure the House will realise their need and also their difficulties.

It is in the interests of all concerned - police, pickets, general public, and the House - that the issues involved should be aired before we break for the recess.

He had discussed the problems at his surgeries over the weekend and at a family wedding. Most of the people there were miners and their families and they were extremely concerned.

He had discussions with his Labour Party colleagues over a dinner and also with the legal advisor of the Yorkshire area of the National Union of Mineworkers. All the comments he got emphasized the need and urgency of a debate.

The deaconess of the church to which he belonged had complained about the treatment of her son who worked for British Rail. On three occasions recently he had been stopped and on one occasion was taken out of his car and not only his car searched but also body searched.

Opposition MPs had received numerous complaints from constituents and believed there was great public concern at the situation.

Mr Robert McCrindle (Brentwood and Ongar, C), in subsequent points of order, said that on several occasions in the last few weeks similar applications had been refused by the Speaker.

But (he said) on the intimation that on this occasion the application has the support of the Opposition Front Bench it seems to have led to a different decision.

Can you, in the interests of backbenchers which you have rightly sought to protect since you



McKay: Discussions at a family wedding.

became Speaker, make it clear that there is no particular difference in an MP seeking an emergency debate if he has the support of Front Benches and if he does not?

The Speaker: He is right that I have unashamedly sought to defend the interests of backbenchers. I hope Mr McCrindle will take note that the application was made by a backbencher.

Mr David Steel, Leader of the Liberal Party: Will the debate be a narrow one or a wide one? Will it be limited to the matters raised by Mr McKay or to more primary issues affecting the mining dispute itself?

The Speaker: The motion will be on the application that I have granted.

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