

before the law; I mean our Armed Forces who sometimes suffer from danger at a time when we are safe; I mean our police force; I mean our Civil Service; I mean all the apparatus of our traditional State which has grown up over the centuries. We must be prepared not merely to defend them if they were to be attacked by some foreign enemy. We have shown in our lifetime that in such circumstances we are prepared to defend them. However, we must be prepared to defend them in argument by standing up for them whenever we hear them made fun of in the bar parlour, in the factory, in the office, or even in Parliament. My Lords, I have done, because the hour is late, but I am grateful to the noble Lord who has introduced this debate.

Share

9.49 p.m.

Lord HARRIS of GREENWICH

My Lords, this has been a wide-ranging debate, and that is something of a British understatement! To name only a few, it has ranged from the Common Market to the views of the noble Lord, Lord Wigg, on this House and its Members, to the Shrewsbury Pickets, to the views of my noble friend Lord Soper on Clause 4 of the Labour Party Constitution, and it has covered also Anglo-Soviet trade.

It has been the occasion of one of the more notable speeches to which I have had the privilege of listening; namely, the speech which we have just heard from the noble Lord, Lord Hailsham of Saint Marylebone. His views I almost totally shared, except for one thing which I regarded as a joke. However, when I realised that noble Lords on his side of the House were not joining in the laughter on our side, I recognised that it was intended to be taken seriously. It was the noble Lord's reference to the admirable way in which the Conservative Party conducts its internal affairs. Before I begin

to reply to the debate in general, I apologise in advance to the many noble Lords whose speeches I shall not have the opportunity of commenting upon. But, obviously, as the noble and learned Lord, Lord Hailsham, has just said, to do so would inevitably prolong this debate to a quite intolerable degree.

The noble Lord, Lord Chalfont, who introduced this debate— and I think we are all indebted to him for having done so— has long taken an interest in this subject. It is one which has been discussed on a number of occasions in your Lordships' House; and rightly so, for in their various manifestations subversion and terrorism affect each one of us. On the other hand, we must be sure what we mean when we use terms like "subversion ". Indeed, the noble Lord, Lord Wigg, said there is some need to define our terms, and I think that is right. Subversive activities are generally regarded as those which threaten the safety or wellbeing of the State, and which are intended to undermine or overthrow Parliamentary democracy by political, industrial or violent means. Militancy in the pursuit of trade union or other disputes with employers is obviously not necessarily subversive. We might define terrorism, for the purpose of this debate, as the use of violence for political ends. Not all subversive organisations are terrorist organisations. Terrorist groups generally have subversive aims, but not all the groups which have operated against British interests have the aim of subverting Parliamentary democracy in this country. So much for questions of definition.

The noble Lord, Lord Chalfont, began by speaking on extremism in our political life. He referred to extremist penetration of the trade unions, and to the public statements of those who are committed to the overthrow of our democratic institutions. Some of the organisations to which the noble Lord referred do indeed make no secret of their aims. The Communist Party of Great Britain has not attempted to conceal the fact that its prime purpose is to secure influence within the trade union movement as the means of