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Parliamentary sketch

## Newcomer adopts a novel nuclear option

BY ANN TRENEMAN

A NUCLEAR strike was launched by Michael Gove, the fledgling Tory MP, at John Reid, the Defence Secretary, yesterday. This was brave if not a little foolish, for Mr Reid is known to eat new MPs for breakfast. But Mr Gove is a man of urgent opinions and it was only a matter of time before one escaped during defence questions.

For years he has vented his views through a column in this newspaper and now he has put his natural belligerence to even better use on the floor of the House. Mr Gove, who does not approve of shillyshallying, dug deep to find a tone of utter moral outrage that we do not hear enough of in the Commons these days.

"Can the Secretary of State reassure me that he will no longer APPEASE the hard-Left sentiment of the unilateralist disarmament (Tory cheers drowned out the next word which may have been supporters) on his benches?"

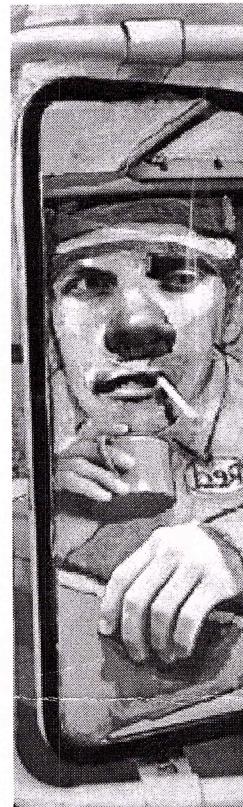
Wow. No one talks about "hard-Left sentiment" anymore. But Mr Gove was not finished. "Can he assure me that he will end prevarication on this question and give a FIRM commitment that the nuclear deterrent will be modernised urgently in the interest of defence of this country?"

Mr Reid sneered that Mr Gove was a newcomer and so may not know that he has never appeased and will never appease anyone calling for unilateral nuclear disarmament. He then gave a little punch when he noted that these people included Michael Portillo, the former Tory Defence Secretary (Mr Gove was Mr Portillo's biographer and his disciple). Mr Reid started shouting about CND. Everyone loved this, for it was all so terribly old-fashioned. "Let's hear it for CND!" shouted a Tory. "Let's hear it for Michael Portillo," shouted someone, possibly not a Tory.

There was a pause as Chris Mullin stood up. Now Mr Mullin is a card-carrying member of CND. He was also Minister for Africa who lost his job at the last reshuffle. I am not sure that Mr Mullin is hard Left exactly, but since being dismissed he has been quite a pain.

He swayed and seemed, for a moment, to be lost for words as he absorbed the attack on CND. Everyone laughed at his feigned discomfiture (Mr Mullin may be a peacenik but he is a fiercely argued one).

"Yes, ah . . ." he said in his squeaky voice. "All I was looking for, Mr Speaker, was a little bit of transparency," he said. This brought more howls for it was so obviously not the case. Mr Mullin then inquired: if Mr Reid could not tell him when the decision would be taken, then



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who could? He fixed a look at Mr Mullin. "As they say in Glasgow, I'm yer man," he said, the words merging into one and sounding like "Imyrman". He evaded the question while claiming to be utterly transparent and honest.

Oh, the Defence Secretary was having fun. He attacked everyone who attacked him and that seemed to be just about everyone.

The final assault came from Gordon Prentice, who may not be hard Left but is Leftish. He demanded to know if there would just be endless debate about the nuclear deterrent or if there would be a vote.

Mr Reid chortled that he was now under attack for having too much debate and for not enough debate. He looked very happy as he said this: it is clear that he loves to go nuclear.

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