

THE LATE SIR DAVID PRICE

A Tribute by the Rt Hon the Lord Jenkin of Roding

It is a frequent complaint about the House of Commons that far too few MPs have firsthand experience in manufacturing industry. Indeed, this is nothing new; in the early 1960s when I was working in the chemical industry, my bosses, knowing of my interest in politics, complained to me “that there are far too few people in Parliament who know anything about industry”. My response was immediate: “You name me an industrial company and I will tell you the name of an MP they sacked”. This led to their agreeing that if I were elected, they would not sack me immediately!



There was one notable exception to this dismal record: ICI, then by some margin the leading UK chemical company, had kept David Price on after his election to Parliament in 1955. For me, David had always been a beacon on whom I set my sights.

Even before I entered the Commons in 1964, he had urged me that if and when I was elected, I simply had to join the Parliamentary and Scientific Committee, and of course I did so. Very quickly I realised the value of the P & Sci and was a fairly regular attendee at its meetings. So it was no surprise when, in 1973, the then Chairman, Sir Harry Legge-Bourke MP, felt obliged to resign due to illness, that David Price was elected to take his place. He quickly established his authority. Under his leadership, the Committee prospered, with programmes of meetings, speakers and visits which attracted rising attendances. He always made it his practice to undertake some research in the Commons library on any topic due to be discussed, so that if, following the opening speeches, there was any hesitation in the discussion, he was able to start it off with a well-chosen question or comment. He also personally wrote to the speakers after an event to thank them for addressing the Committee – a courtesy which many appreciated. He was re-elected in 1974.

Then again, in 1979, the post fell vacant, and David was elected and served a second term, this time for the full three years. Though he described himself as a ‘retread’, this election for a second term was in fact a great tribute to the reputation he had built up, and so far as I can find, has never been equalled. There is no doubt that the Parliamentary & Scientific Committee owed a big debt of gratitude to Sir David Price.

Though David Price was a very independent-minded Conservative MP, he held a number of junior offices in the Government, and in 1962, after the “Night of the Long

Knives” he was appointed Parliamentary Secretary to the Board of Trade. In the Heath Government of 1970/74 he held a series of Junior Ministerial roles in Technology, Aviation and Aerospace, subjects in which he made himself a considerable expert. He found himself at the eye of the storm when Rolls Royce, facing imminent collapse over the RB211 Aero Engine, had to be propped up by Government; when he was dropped by Ted Heath it was in part because of the fall-out from the Rolls Royce affair.

With his experience in industry, he spoke with authority on the subjects where he held Front Bench positions and earned a merited reputation for knowing what he was talking about. He was a One Nation Tory who did not hesitate to express views somewhat out of line with many of his colleagues! After his wife, Rosemary, broke her back in a serious fall, David became a great champion of the disabled, and campaigned tirelessly for improved access to public buildings for people in wheelchairs.

Through all this David’s support for the Parliamentary & Scientific Committee could always be relied on; there is no doubt that over the years in which he was in Parliament, this support was greatly valued by his colleagues in all Parties. He will be sadly missed.