

Cyril hits double trouble

REFS CRY 'FOUL' OVER DINNER

ROCHDALE MP, Mr Cyril Smith, got himself booked for "ungentlemanly conduct" on Monday night—by the secretary of Rochdale Soccer Referees Association.

Cyril was due to "play" to a crowd of 130 at the referees' £6.50-a-head annual men's dinner tomorrow.

But he declared himself unavailable 72 hours before the "kick-off"—and left the referees without a "substitute."

Referees secretary, Paul Harrison, drew the "yellow card" on Cyril and

DATE

declared: "I am disgusted.

"I have been on the telephone since 7 pm trying to get a substitute speaker and I haven't got one yet."

Mr Smith, a vice-president of the Referees Association, was a great success as a speaker at last year's dinner.

Mr Harrison of Higher Lomax Lane, Heywood, said he got the first intimation of the let-down when he telephoned Mr Smith's

home on Monday night to confirm the arrangements for tomorrow night's "do" at the Spinning Wheel Restaurant, Dearnley. He was told by Cyril's mum, Mrs Eva Smith, that the MP would not be attending.

Then he rang Liberal Party headquarters in Drake Street, Rochdale, and spoke to the MP.

Mr Harrison said: "Mr Smith said he was sorry, he would not be coming and anyway I had not confirmed it in writing.

"He said the Abortion Bill was due on Friday and the rest of the week would

be taken up with education. He was going to London, on Tuesday morning and would not be back until Friday night.

"But I HAD confirmed the arrangement—on 11 October last year. And his reply, on House of Commons notepaper, was dated 17 October. I read it to him.

"To be fair to him, his letter did mention the possibility that Parliamentary business might interfere, but I feel he used that as an excuse for not having got in touch with me earlier.

"And anyway, I understand that he spoke to our chairman, Mr Joe Wildman, while attending a function only a fortnight ago and said then that he would be coming."

Mr Smith was incensed. He said: "They are cheeky sods. I am under no obligation to them. I will not be pushed around by the Referees Association or any other groups to attend silly dinners."

He stressed that his acceptance had been subject to his being free from commitments in the House of Commons.

"I don't know what will be the business of the House more than a week in advance," he said. "This week there are two days on education and the Abortion Bill is scheduled for Friday at 9.30."

He added that he had a brief discussion with a member of the association at an engagement at Oulder Hill Community School last week, when he said he would attend the dinner if he was in Rochdale.

● YESTERDAY, the referees announced they had signed on a "substitute"—at a fee of £150. The speaker will be Mr Peter Maloney, ex-monk, commando, parachutist and TV personality, who is a senior lecturer at Liverpool University.

ANGRY SHOUTS AT DITTA

PROTEST-MARCH REFUSAL

MR SMITH also turned down an invitation on Monday to join a protest march in support of Mrs Anwar Ditta.

She and members of the Anwar Ditta Defence Committee went to the public meeting of Rochdale Liberal Party, which followed the private annual meeting.

Towards the end, members of the Defence Committee accused the Liberals of being racist and arguments broke out. Mrs Ditta and her supporters started to leave, but shouting continued for some minutes.

Earlier, Mrs Ditta asked Mr Smith to join a demonstration on 1 March in support of the campaign to reunite her, in this country, with the three children she claims are hers.

Mr Smith said he would not attend the demonstration. Mrs Ditta's claim had already been given appeal priority and "there is no way you can influence the appeal by protesting. This is the same as a court of law."

Mr Smith said he dealt with two or three cases a

day, which put him in touch with immigration authorities. He would deal with them in his own way because he did not want to prejudice future cases, and he had been reasonably effective so far.

One of Mrs Ditta's supporters shouted: "I know if Cyril Smith wanted to, he could have those children here in five minutes."

Mr Smith said: "I have respect for this system." If MPs could influence the decisions of courts or in-

quiries, the law would be controlled by Parliament, not by the judicial system.

Parting shot from a Liberal: "I'd have hated to be at this meeting if Cyril Smith hadn't supported her."

● Yesterday, Mrs Ditta told the Observer: "I didn't know things would get out of hand, with people shouting. They didn't speak for me. I wouldn't have said those things. I'm really grateful to Mr Smith and I'm sorry about what happened."

And finally, a word of praise

ROCHDALE Liberal Party president, Mr Bill Bamblin, praised the work of Liberal councillors and Rochdale MP Mr Cyril Smith, at the annual meeting on Monday.

Mr Bamblin said the councillor's work in committees and in the council, had been hard because they held the balance of power.

He said: "Discussion is better than dogma" and

added that spending cuts had been dealt with in a sensible and effective fashion.

Mr Smith, he said, "takes his part and speaks with authority on many important issues. He is respected throughout the country."

He asked party members to make a special effort to support the Liberal cause and the Rochdale association.