

LEADER'S CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

Minutes of the 205th Meeting held at 5.00 pm
on Monday, 15th May 1978, in the Leader's Room
at the House of Commons.

Present: Mrs. Thatcher

Mr. Whitelaw, Sir Keith Joseph,
Lord Thorneycroft, Sir Geoffrey Howe,
Mr. Prior, Mr. Pym, Sir Ian Gilmour,
Mr. Peyton, Mr. Jenkin, Mr. Neave,
Mr. St. John Stevas, Mr. Edwards,
Mr. Nott, Mrs. Oppenheim, Mr. King,
Mr. Taylor.

Mr. Atkins.

In attendance: Mr. Stanley, Mr. Butler, Mr. Patten,
Mr. Ridley, Mr. Nicholson,
Mr. Houston, Mr. Cardona.

Apologies: Lord Carrington, Lord Hailsham,
Mr. Davies, Mr. Maude, Mr. Heseltine.

Further Discussion of Manifesto Drafts and their Implications for
Legislation and Spending - LCC(78)165.

1. Social Services: Retirement

Mr. Jenkin introduced this section of his paper. There was a discussion and the following was agreed:

(i) Flexible Retirement and Equalisation of Pension Ages (Para. 25). It was agreed that further details were required on this complicated subject and that while we were prepared to examine any proposals on their merits, we could give no undertaking at present. It was also agreed that we should note, in this and other proposals, the dangers of increasing the numbers of retired people (and those in education and training) while financing these increases by heavier burdens on a decreasing number of people in work. It was noted that there was no guarantee that people who retired from jobs would necessarily be replaced by people from the unemployment register - the positions might well not be filled or might be merged with other positions.

(ii) Pensioner Credits. We should give this subject very low prominence in the Manifesto.

(iii) Abolition of the Earnings Rule. We should maintain the pledge in the last Manifesto, which specified that this would be done "as soon as resources allow". It was noted that the sense of grievance against the earnings rule was very considerable and it was important to have something positive to say to organisations like Age Concern.

(iv) Paragraph 31 on Christmas bonuses was agreed.

(v) In Government we were likely to develop a code of practice to guide the Occupational Pensions Board in giving pension scheme members the right to participate in the running of their schemes.

(vi) Age Addition. We should not emphasise our desire to increase this in the Manifesto.

(vii) War Pensioners. It was agreed to free the war widow's pension from tax as soon as possible.

(viii) The Disabled. The proposal to remove mobility allowance anomalies was agreed. We wished to do as much as possible to help the disabled.

2. Wales

Mr. Edwards introduced the draft Welsh Manifesto. It was noted that particular proposals which would be contained in the general UK Manifesto would also be inserted in the Welsh Manifesto. It was agreed that further proposals, such as points on road construction and other specifically regional issues, should be inserted in the Welsh Manifesto.

There was a discussion. It was agreed that there should be no reference to the Rural Development Board in the Manifesto, and that the expression (in the section on health and social services) "area health authorities" would be amended to read "local health authorities". It was also agreed that Mr. Edwards would discuss his proposal for Cardiff airport with Mr. Nott and the West Country Members Group.

3. Education and the Arts

Mr. St. John Stevas introduced his paper and there was a discussion. The following points were agreed:

(i) "Overriding" should be inserted before "need" in para. 4a.

(ii) There was no legal basis for zoning and the proposal to abolish rigid zoning arrangements in para. 5.5 should not be referred to in the Manifesto which would, however, make clear our opposition to the practice.

(iii) We should not set up a professional Teaching Council (para. 6.1).

(iv) We should not refer to the James Committee recommendations on in-service training (para. 6.2).

(v) The proposals on standards in paragraph 7 could not be implemented by using Departmental powers or issuing circulars. The best ways to encourage higher standards were by the restoration of the role of examinations and publications of results (5.4), more effective inspections and the presence of parents on governing bodies. In particular, the proposals to improve comprehensive schools in para. 5.5 should be achieved by these means.

(vi) There did not seem to be a very strong case for an inquiry on religious education and the establishment of a further national advisory body. The Research Department would find out whether the Inspectorate had carried out an inquiry into the subject and, if so, when.

(vii) There was scope for improving the services of the DHSS and the DES for the under-5s (para. 11).

(viii) We should encourage voucher experiments, and remove any obstacles which prevented them being held.

(ix) We should not propose a funding and planning agency for higher education (para. 12.2).

(x) While it might be desirable to carry out an internal review of the student grant system, this should be referred to in a speech but not in the Manifesto. We did not wish to arouse expectations or fears over parental contributions or student loans. There was a case for retaining parental contributions to students' maintenance.

The Arts. It was agreed that we should include the word "Arts" in the title of the Secretary of State and in the name of the Department.

It was also agreed that we remained committed to the introduction of a Public Lending Right as advocated in "The Right Approach".

The meeting closed at 7.15 p.m.