

CONFIDENTIAL

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LEADER'S CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

66th MEETING

5.00 p.m., Wednesday, 25th June, 1975 in
the Leader's Room at the House of Commons.

AGENDA

1. Minutes of the 65th Meeting - attached.
2. Future business.
3. Any other business.

Conservative Research Department,
24 Old Queen Street, London, S.W.1

CFF/MEM
25.6.75

LEADER'S CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

Minutes of the 66th Meeting held at 5.00 p.m. on Wednesday 25th June 1975, in the Leader's Room at the House of Commons.

Present: Mrs. Thatcher (in the Chair)
 Mr. Whitelaw, Sir Keith Joseph,
 Sir Geoffrey Howe, Mr. Gilmour,
 Mr. Peyton, Mr. Prior, Mr. Jenkin,
 Mr. St. John-Stavas, Mr. Maude, Mr. Raison,
 Mr. Younger, Mr. Neave, Mr. Buchanan-Smith
 (for items 3 to 6), Mr. Edwards, Mr. Jopling,
 Lord Thorneycroft.
 Mr. Atkins.
 Mr. Griffiths (for items 1 and 2),
 Mr. Montgomery, Mr. Shelton, Mr. Patten,
 Mr. Ridley, Mr. Nicholson (in attendance).

Apologies: Lord Hailsham, Lord Carrington, Mr. Maudling.

1. Business of the Week

On Monday 30th June there would be a Supply Day, with subject to be decided, followed by opposed Private Business (the Eastbourne Harbour Bill), and the Lords' Amendments to the Coal Industry Bill (Mr. McNair Wilson).

On Tuesday 1st July, Mr. David Lane would seek leave to introduce his Standardisation of Containers Bill under the 10 Minute Rule, and this would be followed by the first day of the Report Stage of the Industry Bill, with a 2 line Whip (Mr. Haseltine, Mr. King).

On Wednesday 2nd July Mr. George Rodgers would seek leave to introduce his Common Ownership Bill under the 10 Minute Rule and this would be followed by the second day of the Report Stage of the Industry Bill (Mr. Haseltine, Mr. King).

On Thursday 3rd July, there would be the final day of the Report Stage of the Industry Bill, followed by its Third Reading on which there would be a 3 line Whip.

On Friday 4th July, there would be a half day Supply Day, with a debate on an EEC Document.

On Monday 7th July, there would be Private Members' Motions until 7 p.m., those selected in the ballot being the Motions of Mr. Kilfadder, Mr. Wellbeloved and Mrs. Audrey Wise. This would possibly be followed by the Remaining Stages of the Statutory Corporations (Financial Provisions) Bill.

2. Subjects for the Supply Days

Mr. Griffith said that, for the Supply Day on 4th July, the Government wanted a debate on the European Budget and although we did not accept that the Government should dictate what subjects should be debated on Opposition Supply Days, we might accept this proposal since it would enable us to have a wide-ranging economic debate. There was a discussion. It was noted that the economic team were exceptionally busy at the moment and would not welcome

...../this debate,

this debate. It was agreed that we could usefully debate instead a document on the Common Agricultural Policy and that if any time was left at the end of this debate, it might be devoted to a document on control of textile imports. Debating the G.A.P. now would not preclude a further debate on agriculture later in the summer.

After a short discussion, it was agreed to debate the fishing industry on 30th June. Mr. Jopling referred to a brief on the U.K. fishing industry which had been circulated, drawing attention to the number of British trawlers which had been scrapped or laid up over the last 17 months, the fact that Britain was the only country in the EEC which was obliged to reduce the size of its fishing fleet (partly because other countries were receiving so much government aid), and the fear that, if nothing were done, there would be increased unemployment in all fishing ports and Britain would have to spend up to £100 million per year importing fish from other countries. The cost of continuing the U.K. subsidy, which the Government was preparing to end on 30th June, was £64 million for the next six months.

It was agreed that we should support the continuation of the subsidy, but that in the debate, rather than simply pressing for that, we should draw attention to the general problems of the fishing industry and perhaps refer to the fact that Mr. Crosland, who sat for a fishing port, seemed to have done very little to help the industry.

It was agreed not to vote at the end of the debate, although there was a fear that the Scottish Nationalists might force a division. Mr. Jenkin said he would probably want good votes on certain amendments to the Coal Industry Bill later that night, but it was agreed that Mr. Atkins should seek the postponement of the further consideration of this Bill.

3. Voting

It was agreed that there would be a running three line Whip on the last day of the Report Stage of the Industry Bill and on the Third Reading.

Mr Edwards said that a number of M.P.s thought that, in addition to voting against the Second Reading of the Welsh Development Agency Bill, we should vote against the money resolution on that Bill as part of general opposition to increased Government spending. The Government had spoken of spending money on the Agency as rapidly as possible. It had been suggested that we might take the Government by surprise and thus defeat them, and it would be helpful for this to coincide with a Conservative victory in the Woolwich West by-election. It was felt, however, that surprise votes were extremely difficult to win without very considerable preparation, and that there would be a hostile reaction in Wales if the Conservatives used votes on the Bill for purely party political purposes.

4. LCC's Members' Broadcasts and Speeches

Mrs. Thatcher said it would be helpful if members invited to take part on BBC or ITV programmes would seek advice from Mr. Todd or Mr. Lindsey in Central Office; this advice was available over the weekend.

It was also agreed that at each Monday's Steering Committee Mr. Patten would produce a list of key economic indicators and other political events for the forthcoming week. The Committee

could then decide which spokesmen might react to these events. There was a tendency for a large number of long speeches to be made each weekend, this meant that members of the Shadow Cabinet were competing with each other for limited space in the media. It was desirable for more of these speeches to be made earlier in the week.

5. Our Attitude to the Government's Economic Package

Mrs. Thatcher said that some of the members of the Economic Reconstruction Committee were meeting her on Sunday evening (29th June) to prepare a statement on our economic policy. This would be discussed by Steering Committee the following Monday and the Shadow Cabinet on Wednesday. It was essential to reach agreement. Work should also be put in hand, with the assistance of the Research Department, on a list of the various measures which the Government might include in their economic package, and what our response should be to each one. Mrs. Oppenheim said, for example, that the Government was understood to be giving serious consideration to using paragraph 13 of the Price Code to prevent firms from using pay settlements in excess of the Social Contract as allowable costs under the Code, but it was understood that the Treasury was opposed to this. It was noted that the agreed economic statement need not be issued and should not close our options, but merely act as a guide to members of the Shadow Cabinet in putting across our policy.

Mr. Raison suggested that we should have an economic debate before the Government had brought forward their economic measures. There was a discussion. Some members agreed, arguing that we should build on a victory in the Woolwich West by-election to voice our early opposition to some of the sillier notions being proposed, and try to bring attention back to Parliament, where it should be concentrated, rather than almost solely on the Government's talks with the TUC and CBI.

Other members disagreed, arguing that it was to the Party's advantage to avoid being committed to detailed proposals before the Government's statement. We should leave our options open and not give the Government the opportunity to claim that: (a) their unpleasant measures had been desired by the Conservatives, and (b) the Conservatives had specified a number of additional unpleasant measures. Even if we only debated public expenditure the Press would exaggerate what we said into "the Tory package of cuts". Many people did not think the economy was seriously wrong - their standards of living had not fallen and they were not yet affected by unemployment. We should leave the odium of awakening the public to the unpleasant truth to the Government which had caused the crisis. In any case, we were doing our best to spell out our policy, and we were effectively pressing the Government to act through Prime Minister's Question Time and elsewhere. The media were showing little interest in our positive work, preferring to give attention to apparent personality clashes both across the parties and within each party. This was fairly normal for this period in the life of an opposition. While an agreed statement would unite the Shadow Cabinet, a Parliamentary debate would inevitably expose differences within the party as a whole, which would simply gratify the Government.

It was agreed that, on balance, we should not press for an economic debate, but that we should continue to give a lead through speeches outside Parliament.

6. Tals on the EEC

Mr. Edwards said that the Belgian Ambassador had asked the Area Agent in Cardiff to arrange for the Belgian Prime Minister to speak in Wales on European union. It was understood that similar requests were likely to be made elsewhere. Such meetings risked exposing differences inside the Party on direct elections to the European Parliament and on economic, monetary and political union. If this meeting could not be prevented, as was desirable, it was agreed that Mr. Griffiths should ensure that our supporters were briefed with a statement of policy.

The meeting closed at 6.10 p.m.

From: Norman Fowler, M.P.



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

24th June, 1975.

The Rt. Hon. Mrs. Margaret Thatcher, M.P.,
House of Commons,
London. S.W.1.

No need to acknowledge
H.A. has advised
per. H.A. to N.P.

Dear Margaret.

Unfortunately I will be away in Italy tomorrow for Shadow Cabinet.

If there is a possibility of a half supply day could I renew my bid for a debate on the plight of voluntary organisations. This is being raised in the Lords this week and I am quite sure it would be an advantage to follow this up with a Commons debate.

There is no question that many voluntary organisations in the social services field - which have traditionally filled the gaps - now face a very real crisis.

Yours ever
Norman