

LEADER'S CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

Minutes of the 162nd Meeting held at 5.00 p.m. on Wednesday, 11th May 1977, in the Leader's Room at the House of Commons.

Present: Mrs. Thatcher (in the Chair)
Mr. Whitelaw, Sir Keith Joseph,
Lord Thorneycroft, Sir Geoffrey Howe,
Mr. Prior, Mr. Pym, Sir Ian Gilmour,
Mr. Jenkin, Mr. Davies, Mr. Neave,
Mr. Heseltine, Mr. St. John Stevas,
Mr. Maude, Mr. Edwards, Mr. Nott,
Mrs. Oppenheim, Mr. King, Mr. Taylor.
In attendance: Sir Michael Havers, Mr. Butler,
Mr. Stanley, Mr. Patten, Mr. Ridley,
Mr. Hooson, Mr. Nicholson.
Apologies: Lord Carrington, Lord Hallsham,
Mr. Peyton.

1. Proposed Business for the Week 16th-23rd May

On Monday, 16th May, there would be Private Members' Motions: those of Mr. N. Mates, Mr. F. Burden and Mr. C. Morrison. These would be followed by the Second Reading of the Post Office Bill (Mr. Lamont) and by Prayers relating to Police Discipline and Complaints Regulations (Mr. Alison).

On Tuesday, 17th May, Mr. B. Grocott would seek leave to introduce his General Elections (Limitation of Expenses) Bill under the 10 Minute Rule. This would be followed by the Second Reading of the Local Authorities (Restoration of Works Powers) Bill (Mr. Speed), and by the Second Reading of the Control of Office Development Bill (Mr. Rossi). This would be followed by a Motion on EEC Documents R/75/77 and R/477, R/478 and R/479/77 on Energy Policy (Mr. H. Gray).

On Wednesday, 18th May, Mr. J. Watkinson would seek leave to introduce his Council House Tenants (Security of Tenure) Bill under the 10 Minute Rule. This would be followed by a Supply day, and by a Motion on EEC Documents R/90/76 and R/540/76 on Sulphur in Fuel Oil.

On Thursday, 19th May, there would be a Supply Day. This would be followed by a debate on the Second Report from the Select Committee on Overseas Development in Session 1975/6 on Relations with Developing Countries, and the First Special Report in 1976-77. This would be followed by the Remaining Stages of the Rent (Agriculture) Amendment Bill (Mr. Rossi).

On Friday, 20th May, there would be the Private Members' Bills of Mr. D. Hunt, Mr. F. Evans, Mr. P. Cormack, Mr. K. Lomas and Mr. E. Marshall.

On Monday, 23rd May, there would be a debate on the Report of the Annan Committee on the Future of Broadcasting (Mr. Whitelaw). This would be followed by a Motion on Immigration Rules.

2. Matters Arising on Business

There was a discussion and the following points were agreed:

(i) We would enquire further into the purpose of Mr. Watkinson's Council House Tenants (Security of Tenure) Bill on 18th May, and we should not vote on the Motion on Immigration rules on 23rd May.

(ii) We should ask for a debate on youth unemployment in Government time.

(iii) Mr. Hamish Gray would speak in the debate on Energy Policy on 17th May, Mr. Sainsbury in that on Sulphur in Fuel Oil on 18th May and Mr. Critchley would "wind-up" in that on Broadcasting on 23rd May.

3. Subject for Supply Days

There was a discussion and it was agreed to debate the forthcoming Belgrade Conference on the Helsinki agreements on either 18th or 19th May, with Mr. Davies and Mr. Blaker speaking, and that we should seek to debate the Navy on the other day, instead of relations with developing countries, as originally proposed.

It was also agreed that debates on the following subjects would be desirable in the near future: youth unemployment, when the working party's report was published (if the Government failed to provide time for a debate); bank nationalisation (half a day) to coincide with the opening of the banks' campaign (on Monday, 16th May) against the threat of nationalisation; the role of trade unions, possibly relating to the rule of law, or individual rights or the proposed Press Charter; and the NEB and British Tanners' products (half a day).

4. Follow-up to the Local Government Elections

There was a discussion and the following points were agreed:

(i) It was important to give serious attention to the tone of what our representatives on the Conservative-controlled local authorities did and said over the next few months, as the Party as a whole would be judged in this light.

(ii) Our policy in Local Government could be summed up in the slogan "cut out waste", which was preferable to the expression "cut public spending". It was important for members of the Shadow Cabinet to use their influence to see that this was the tone set by our councillors and to maintain contact with them.

(iii) We should seek to persuade Conservative councils not to cut their grants to local voluntary bodies; the encouragement of such bodies provided an economic way of using scarce resources.

(iv) We should obtain examples from our local authorities of success in getting value for money.

(v) We should encourage Conservative local authorities to ensure that the local authority associations took a less deferential attitude towards Government pressures than they had in the past.

5. Devolution

Mr. Pym reported on the line he would take in his speech to the Scottish Party Conference, as agreed at the meeting of the Shadow Cabinet on 27th April (see Minutes, item 4). It was noted that Mr. Taylor and Mr. Edwards had read and approved Mr. Pym's speech. The following points were further agreed:

(i) We did not propose either to retract our commitment to a directly elected assembly or to re-emphasise it. Our line was that every Party would enter any further constitutional discussions, making use of the work they had done in the past, but without stipulating conditions for the future.

(ii) We should emphasise the cost of the proposals in the recent Government Bill.

(iii) We should examine what further administrative devolution might take place.

6. Direct Elections

Mr. Atkins reported on the legislation that the Government were believed to be preparing. It was agreed that we should need more definite information before discussing the matter further.

7. The Washington Appointment

Mrs. Thatcher reported that information had just been received that Mr. Peter Jay, the Prime Minister's son-in-law, had been appointed to succeed Sir Peter Ramsbotham as British Ambassador in Washington. It was agreed that members of the Shadow Cabinet should try to avoid commenting, although if pressed, we might indicate our surprise at this appointment.

8. Preparations for Stage Three

Mr. Prior reported on the sort of agreements he understood the Government would seek to obtain and how he believed trade union leaders would react. There was a discussion and the following points were agreed:

(i) It was important to give full consideration to the public relations aspects of our response to the Stage Three proposals; whether to warn in advance of the dangers of allowing pay claims to soar, and if so, when.

(ii) We should, however, at no point seek to undermine the Government's position while talks with the union leaders were continuing.

(iii) A continuing rise in unemployment would make this a much more sensitive political issue.

The meeting closed at 6.10 p.m.