

LEADER'S STEERING COMMITTEE

Minutes of the 33rd Meeting held at 5.00 p.m. on Monday 13th October 1975 in the Leader's Room at the House of Commons

Present: Mrs. Thatcher (in the Chair)

Mr. Whitelaw
Mr. Maudling
Mr. Gilmour
Sir Geoffrey Howe
Sir Keith Joseph
Lord Carrington
Mr. Peyton
Mr. Prior
Lord Thorneycroft
Mr. Maude

Mr. Atkins

In attendance: Mr. Shelton
Mr. Patten
Mr. Ridley
Mr. Nicholson

1. Post-Conference Discussion

Mrs. Thatcher said that we now faced the difficult task of retaining the initiative. The Party Conference had spelt out our anti-Socialist strategy, and we should now emphasise this at every level of the Party - for example at the local government level, over the Community Land Bill.

There was a discussion. Among the points raised were the following:

(a) Local councillors were often unaware of, or even ignored, our policies. Communications were often bad between them and their local associations. They tended to resist any intervention by Members of Parliament in local affairs. Perhaps our most effective activists in local government might lead a Central Office seminar for their colleagues in local government. We should also maintain close contact with the leaders of the Conservative groups of every major local authority. When an issue involving them arose, a policy statement could be sent to each one.

(b) We should improve our communications with the various interest groups and professional bodies, and seek both to inform them and to get them to take action themselves. The ignorance of the estate agents on the Community Land Bill, and the inactivity of employers in face of the Employment Protection Bill, had both been disturbing.

(c) While it was recognised that "Monthly News" had greatly improved, there remained scope for making it more of a newspaper like "Labour Weekly" or "Liberal News". There might be a separate page on local government, more organisational and policy direction, and more attention given to national and

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local by-elections. Shortage of funds, however, remained a major obstacle.

(d) When a Bill appeared the Shadow Minister with the Whip and others concerned should take early decisions on: the few main points we should concentrate criticism on; how long we should aim to spend in Committee and Report stage; and the major concessions we wished to extract; liaison with special interest groups and local activists; and the timing of wider publicity activities, for example the use of a Party Political Broadcast.

(e) We should try to get a Central Office official accredited so that he could attend all Government Departmental press conferences on behalf of "Monthly News" and "Politics Today" so as to be in a position to give those concerned the earliest possible report.

(f) It was vital to establish speedily an effective organisation for Conservative trade unionists. Mr. Prior would prepare a paper, in coordination with Central Office, the Treasurers, and Mr. Jack Page, emphasising what the general objectives of the organisation should be, and how it might be financed without depriving the Party of general income.

(g) Colleagues were asked to try both to make more speeches during the week rather than just at weekends and to seek to reduce their Central Office press handouts to the few main points they most wished to emphasise.

2. Parliamentary Tactics

There was a discussion, in which the following points were made:

(a) We should decide which of the proposals in the Queen's Speech we would want to concentrate our attack on, and make adequate preparations in advance.

(b) We should select certain Government Ministers who were especially vulnerable to attack (e.g. Mrs. Castle) and mount at Question Time the type of operation involving a small group of MPs that had been used with effect at Prime Minister's Questions.

3. Foreign Affairs

At Mr. Maudling's request it was agreed that pressing foreign affairs topics should be discussed at Steering Committee meetings on Mondays. It was also agreed to establish a committee to liaise between the various back bench committees at Westminster and our representatives in the European Parliament, to ensure that our statements were effectively coordinated. This would meet weekly to review the future business at the European Parliament. It was also agreed that the Shadow Cabinet would have to decide in time on the political groups in that Parliament with which we should liaise.

The meeting closed at 6.15 p.m.