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LEADER'S CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

63rd MEETING

5.00 p.m., Wednesday, 21st May, 1975 in the
Leader's Room at the House of Commons

AGENDA

1. Minutes of the 62nd Meeting - attached.
2. Future business.
3. General discussion on economic policies and tactics.
4. Any other business.

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

CFP/MEM
19.5.75

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MRS. THATCHER

I enclose a copy of the Agenda for this evening.

Mr. Maude asked if he could raise - early and very briefly - the request from the Royal Commission on the Press for evidence from the Party. Mr. Whitelaw declined to submit evidence when he was Chairman, but the Royal Commission has repeated the request.

The view in the past has been that there is no advantage in the Party submitting evidence to Commissions or Inquiries. When one does so, the body concerned appears to sit in judgement on the Party's policy and we are consequently somewhat inhibited by the eventual Report. On the other hand, independent groups or individuals associated with the Party should be encouraged to put "a" (rather than "the") Conservative point of view in evidence.

This attitude seems sensible and I can see no reason for changing it. We did so when we submitted evidence to Layfield but I am not sure that this was a very happy precedent.

CHRIS PATTEN

19th May, 1975

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TO ALL MEMBERS OF THE LEADER'S CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

I attach the Minutes of the last meeting and a further paper on Electoral Reform by Lord Hailsham for discussion at tomorrow night's meeting of the Leader's Consultative Committee. (See item 3 on the agenda).

CHRISTOPHER PATTEN

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

CFP/SMW
16.5.75

LEADER'S CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

Minutes of the 63rd Meeting held at 5.00 p.m. on Wednesday 21st May 1975, in the Leader's Room at the House of Commons.

Present: Mrs. Thatcher (In the Chair)

Sir Keith Joseph, Lord Hailsham, Mr. Maudling, Sir Geoffrey Howe, Mr. Gilmour, Lord Carrington, Mr. Peyton, Mr. St. John-Stevas, Mr. Heseltine, Mr. Raison, Mr. Buchanan-Smith, Mr. Edwards, Mr. Neave, Mr. Younger, Mr. Fowler, Mrs. Oppenheim, Mr. Atkins

Mr. Shelton, Mr. Patten, Mr. Niblock, Mr. Ridley (In attendance)

Apolgies: Mr. Whitelaw, Mr. Prior, Mr. Jenkins, Lord Thorneycroft.

1. Business of the Week

On Monday 9th June there would either be the Second Reading of the Statutory Corporations (Financial Provisions) Bill or a Supply Day debate on defence. This would be followed by a motion to appoint a Standing Committee on Regional Affairs (Mr. Peyton),

On Tuesday 10th June, Mr. Crowder would seek leave under the 10 Minute Rule to introduce his Rape (Anonymity of Victims) Bill. This would be followed by the fourth day of the Committee Stage on the Finance (No. 2) Bill (Sir Geoffrey Howe and his team).

On Wednesday 11th June, Mrs. Jill Knight would seek leave under the 10 Minute Rule to introduce her Child Protection (Medicines) Bill. This would be followed by the remaining stages of the Social Security Pensions Bill or by the Sex Discrimination Bill (Mr. Fowler). There might also be a debate on a motion on an EEC document on economic policy guidelines (alternatively, this might be held on Thursday).

On Thursday 12th June, there would be a debate on Members' Interests and on the Right Hon. Member for Walsall North (Mr. Peyton)

On Friday 13th June the day would be devoted to Government business and the Second Reading of the Hare Coursing Bill (Mr. Gilmour). There would be a free vote on this Bill.

On Monday 16th June there would either be a Supply Day debate devoted to defence, or the Second Reading of the Statutory Corporations (Financial Provisions) Bill, if it had not been dealt with the previous Monday.

2. Clay Cross

Lord Hailsham said that Conservative peers were planning to table a number of amendments to the Government's legislation. It was important that the wording of this should match exactly the amendments which had been tabled on behalf of the Conservative

opposition in the Commons. Hopefully the Bill would be returned to the Commons in the same form that it would have left the lower House had Conservative amendments been accepted there. There was a strong feeling among Conservative peers that the House of Lords should stand on all its amendments even if this meant a constitutional row. Lord Carrington underlined the importance of the Conservative opposition in the Commons giving its approval to the Conservative peers' amendments as soon as possible. Lord Hailsham said that he had kept close contact with Mr. Ian Percival and would be in touch with the Research Department on this matter.

3. Economic Debate

There followed a brief discussion on the economic policy and the forthcoming debate on the economy in the House of Commons. Mrs. Thatcher said that the opposition would be attacked for not having a clear economic policy and that she and Sir Geoffrey Howe had considered how this attack could most effectively be countered. Mrs. Oppenheim reported that according to the CBI the Government was considering the French system of price control, which involved less statutory interference than that in force in this country. Lord Carrington said that he believed that it was a mistake to concentrate too much critical attention on the personality of Mr. Wedgwood Benn, who was consequently able to build himself up in the public mind. It was agreed that the main effort should be devoted to exposing the flaws in Mr. Benn's arguments for greater State control over the economy.

4. Housing

Mr. Raison said that in view of the disarray into which the Government housing programme had fallen, he would favour an early Supply Day debate on housing.

5. The Stonehouse Affair

Lord Hailsham said that the Commons would have to await the outcome of any legal proceedings against Mr. Stonehouse before expelling him from Parliament, should the Labour M.P. return to this country and stand trial. Mr. Atkins said that he was under the impression that the Government would not be anxious to move the motion to expel Mr. Stonehouse immediately on his return to Britain.

6. Higher Taxation

Mr. St. John-Stevas said that the Government was becoming very unpopular in the universities and that this opened up opportunities for the Conservative Party. On the question of university teachers' pay, he had expressed the view in public that the current dispute should be sent to arbitration, but that did not mean that the Party had committed itself to any particular pay award for university teachers. At the moment the Government was not allowing the recognised arbitration machinery to be used. Mr. St. John-Stevas said that it would be useful to have a debate on the broad aspects of higher education after the referendum on the EEC.

7. Investment

Sir Keith Joseph suggested that a Supply Day debate might be devoted to investment in British industry.

8. Social Services

Mr. Norman Fowler said that a Conservative medical society had been established and he hoped that colleagues would bring this to the notice of medical practitioners who might be interested in joining it. He also recommended that a half-day Supply debate be held on charities and voluntary organisations, many of which were facing financial difficulties as a result of the Government's failure to check inflation.

9. Agriculture

Mr. Jopling said that once the referendum was over it would seem necessary for the Community to agree on a parity change for the 'green' pound. This would mean a reduction in the subsidy element provided by monetary compensatory amounts which are provided when the value of the ordinary £ declines in relation to other Community currencies. Mr. Maudling pointed out that in the referendum campaign considerable play was being made of the fact that the British consumer was being subsidised by the Community, and questioned whether it was sensible to advocate a substantial reduction of this subsidy element once the referendum was over. Mr. Jopling observed that there had already been a number of changes in the value of the 'green £' as a result of sterling's devaluation and that the situation became difficult once the differential between the 'green £' and the ordinary £ grew to as much as it was at the moment. Mrs. Thatcher urged that the matter be left alone for the moment.

Mr. Jopling said that Government policy towards the fishing and horticultural industries was bound to be a lively issue in the summer months.

10. Scottish Development Agency

Mr. Buchanan-Smith said that he could not see how the Government would succeed in getting on to the Statute Book the Scottish Development Agency Bill this Session, particularly if the discussions in the House of Lords, where the Bill had begun, were protracted.

11. Welsh Development Agency Bill

Mr. Edwards said that the Conservative Party in Wales was necessarily a little on the defensive on both devolution and the Welsh Development Agency Bill. He had been careful not to express outright opposition to this Bill, for which there was a wide measure of support in Wales.

12. Metrication

Mrs. Oppenheim said that Government proposals on metrication were likely to be laid before the House in July. They were bound to be controversial and could well provide the Conservative Party with valuable ground for opposition.

The meeting closed at 6.00 p.m.