

LEADER'S CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

Minutes of the 152nd Meeting held at 5.00 p.m.,
on Wednesday, 23rd February 1977, in the Leader's
Room at the House of Commons.

Present: Mrs. Thatcher (in the Chair)

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

In attendance: Lord Ferrers, Sir Michael Havers,
Mr. Stanley, Mr. Butler, Mr. Douglas,
Mr. Ridley, Mr. Hooson, Mr. Nicholson.

Apologies: Lord Carrington.

1. Future Business for the Week 28th February-7th March

On Monday, 28th February, there would be a half-Supply Day with subjects to be decided. This would be followed by Opposed Private Business: the London Transport Bill, and by the Remaining Stages of the Returning Officers (Scotland) Bill.

On Tuesday, 1st March, Mr. G. Janner would seek leave to introduce his Unfair Dismissal (Overseas Employment) Bill under the 10 Minute Rule. This would be followed by progress in Committee on the Scotland and Wales Bill (Mr. Pym, Mr. Brittan).

On Wednesday, 2nd March, there would be a ballot for motions on Friday, 18th March. Mr. C. Freud would seek leave to introduce his Maps Bill under the 10 Minute Rule. This would be followed by the Second Reading of the Coal Industry Bill (Mr. King, Mr. Gray), and by Opposed Private Business: the GLC General Powers Bill, and by the Remaining stages of the International Finance, Trade and Aid Bill (Mr. Parkinson).

On Thursday, 3rd March, there would be a Supply Day with subjects to be decided. This would be followed by a Motion on EEC Documents on Export Credits.

On Friday, 4th March, there would be the Second Readings of the following Private Members' Bills: Mr. J. Ryman's Building Societies (Reorganisation and Nationalisation) Bill, and those of Mr. R. Sims, Mr. D. Anderson and Mr. B. George.

On Monday, 7th March, there would be the Second Reading of the Consolidated Fund (No. 2) Bill.

2. Matters Arising on Business

There was a discussion and it was agreed that:

(i) We would seek to have a whole day for the Second Reading of the Coal Industry Bill and would try to obtain a half day for debating the Remaining Stages of the International Finance, Trade and Aid Bill.

(ii) There would be a one-line whip for the Committee Stage of the Scotland and Wales Bill on 1st March.

3. Subjects for the Supply Days

There was a discussion and it was agreed that:

(i) We would debate the Economy of Wales on the half Supply Day on 28th February.

(ii) We would debate the Burden of Personal Taxation on the full Supply Day on 3rd March, and vote on the adjournment.

(iii) We would keep in mind other suggested subjects: such as the Government's plan to close certain teacher training colleges in Scotland, and the Arts.

4. Devolution

Mrs. Thatcher congratulated Mr. Pym and Mr. Atkins on the decisive defeat the previous evening of the Government's attempt to guillotine the Scotland and Wales Bill. There was a discussion on the ensuing situation and the following points were agreed:

(i) Our offer of a constitutional convention on devolution remained open, although the Government had at first refused it, but Mr. Pym would not repeat it.

(ii) With the future of the Scotland and Wales Bill in doubt, our policy was to seek an agreement between and within the political parties on the constitutional future of Scotland and Wales. The time available should be used to identify what the genuine options were, and this could be most usefully done by a constitutional convention, which might also discuss the various options with interested bodies in Scotland and Wales.

(iii) If the Government tried to introduce a pre-legislative referendum on the subject of devolution, we would oppose it on the grounds that, in the absence of legislation that had passed through Parliament, people could have no definite idea of what they were voting on.

(iv) Mr. Pym's statement proposing the constitutional convention, made the previous Saturday, 19th February, would be circulated to members of the Shadow Cabinet.

5. Other Business

Mr. Davies reported on the Government's position with regard to the future of the Falkland Islands, and it was agreed that we should press the Foreign Secretary on his intentions and support the wish of the Islanders to remain British. Mr. Davies also reported on the prospects for direct elections to the European Parliament and it was noted that the Government might favour a Party list system, similar to the French system, for these elections.

It was agreed that Mr. Davies would submit a paper on the Conference at Belgrade to review the implementation of the Helsinki declaration.

It was also agreed that Mr. Whitelaw would keep Lord Hailsham informed about the imminent publication of Government reports on Home Office matters.

The meeting closed at 6.00 p.m.