

LEADER'S CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

Minutes of the 60th Meeting held at 5.00pm on Wednesday 30th April 1975, in the Leader's Room at the House of Commons.

Present: Mr. Whitelaw (in the Chair)

Sir Keith Joseph, Sir Geoffrey Howe, Lord Hailsham, Mr. Peyton, Mr. Maudling, Mr. Gilmour, Lord Carrington, Mr. Prior, Mr. Jenkin, Mr. St. John-Stevas, Mr. Heseltine, Mr. Maude, Mr. Neave, Mr. Raison, Mr. Fowler, Mr. Buchanan-Smith, Mr. Edwards, Mr. Jopling.

Apologies: Mrs. Thatcher, Lord Thorneycroft, Mrs. Oppenheim, Mr. Younger.

Mr. Patten, Mr. Ridley, Mr. Nicholson (in attendance)

1. Business of the Week

On Monday 5th May, there would be a Supply Day, with subjects for debate to be decided. This would be followed by proceedings on the Malta Republic Bill (Mr. Tugendhat) and consideration of the Lords' amendments to the Prices Bill (Mrs. Oppenheim, Mr. Lamont). There would be a two line Whip.

On Tuesday 6th May, Mr. David James would seek leave to introduce his British Summer Time Bill under the 10 Minute Rule. This would be followed by the first day of the Debate on the Defence Estimates (Mr. Younger, Mr. Goodhart). There would be a one line Whip.

On Wednesday 7th May, Sir Brandon Rhys-Williams would seek leave to introduce his Housing (Shorthold Tenancies) Bill under the 10 Minute Rule. This would be followed by the conclusion of the Defence Debate (Mr. Whitelaw, Mr. Onslow); and consideration of the Lords' amendments to the Referendum Bill (Mr. Peyton, Sir Michael Havers).

On Thursday 8th May there would be the Second Reading of the Finance Bill (Sir Geoffrey Howe, Mr. Nott) followed by a debate on the Shipbuilding Industry (Northern Ireland) Order (Mr. Neave).

On Friday 9th May there would be Private Members Bills: the remaining stages of the Mobile Homes Bill (Mr. Rossi); and the Second Reading of the Cancer Screening (Education) Bill, and the Representation of the People (Proxy Voting) Bill.

2. The Defence Debate Vote

It was understood that Labour's Left wing would put down an amendment; they should not be prevented from voting for it against the Government. We should abstain on this vote unless the Left wing amendment was so extreme as to threaten the national interest. We could then vote against the White Paper on a three line Whip.

3. Subject for Supply Day

There were four suggestions: the Steel Industry, Pay-beds and the National Health Service, the employment difficulties of school leavers, and the problems of London. There was a discussion. It was agreed that it would be desirable to pin Mr. Bern down with Commons business during the Referendum campaign, expose more effectively the damage for which he was responsible, and seek to embarrass the Government over the controversy surrounding Sir Monty Finniston's remarks about future employment in the Steel Industry. It was felt, however, that this subject could be allowed to build up rather more, and the same was true of Labour's problems on the GLC, which could anyway be referred to in the debate on the GLC (Money) Bill the following day. It was decided to devote the first half of the Supply Day to the problems of school leavers, emphasising Conservative concern at the prospect of high unemployment among this group. The second half would be devoted to the question of pay beds, with a division at 10.00pm.

4. The Problem of Opposition Amendments

Mr. Jenkin raised the problem that faced the Opposition whose substantive amendments to Bills or substantive motions on White Papers or Supply Days could be amended by the Government majority: it was agreed that this might be put to the Committee on Procedure but it was pointed out that procedure had recently been changed in response to MPs' wishes to avoid double votes.

5. "English Grand Committee"

Mr. Peyton said that Mr. Short was considering setting up a Grand Committee to deal with legislation and other matters affecting, for example, the English regions. He said that he had expressed misgivings about such an innovation. There was a short discussion, in which was suggested that the Government was probably trying to ease the problems created by its own torrent of legislation. The subject might be looked at again after discussion by the 1922 Committee.

6. The Kitchen Deficit

It was understood that this was approaching £500,000 but it was thought undesirable to have yet another Select Committee on the subject.

7. Finance Bill Committee

Sir Geoffrey Howe said that the Bill would have three days on the floor of the House before the Whitsun recess. It was thought undesirable to have these debates in the last week before the recess as this would inhibit MPs' campaigning over the Referendum. This might be raised at Business Questions. Some Conservative MPs had expressed reluctance to vote against the increases in vehicle excise duty on the grounds that these increases were necessary to reduce the Government's deficit. It was agreed to attempt to persuade these Members of the need to record the largest vote possible against this tax increase.

8. Mr. Heseltine's Paper on British Leyland (LCC 75/74)

Mr. Heseltine introduced his paper, pointing out that its general argument had been accepted both by the Industry Committee and by certain Conservative MPs with constituencies affected by employment in British Leyland or one of its component manufacturers. There was a discussion. It was

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agreed that there would always be cases where a Conservative Government would be obliged, by considerations of the national interest, to give help to major private companies vital to a particular industry. Such aid, however, should be devoted to rationalising the company and making it more successful. What was more, the provision of aid should be properly accountable to the public. We should not take up an extreme position - either of insisting on the instant closure of the unprofitable parts of British Leyland, or on the other hand arguing for the provision of a permanent subsidy for the whole complex. We should be prepared to offer limited help for specific purposes on defined conditions, for example, the improvement of labour use and industrial relations. We should condemn the Ryder report as an inadequate piece of work. Its proposals would be detrimental to the liquidity and employment in other more efficient companies.

The meeting closed at 6.15 pm.