

LEADER'S CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

Minutes of the 55th Meeting held at 5.00 p.m. on Wednesday 26th March 1975, in the Leader's Room at the House of Commons.

Present: Mrs. Thatcher (In the Chair)

Mr. Whitelaw, Sir Keith Joseph, Sir Geoffrey Howe, Lord Hailsham, Lord Carrington, Mr. Prior, Mr. Pym, Mr. Jenkin, Mr. St. John-Stevas, Mr. Fowler, Mr. Maude, Mr. Heseltine, Mr. Raison, Mrs. Oppenheim, Mr. Neave, Mr. Buchanan-Smith, Mr. Edwards, Mr. Younger

Mr. Atkins

Mr. Montgomery, Mr. Patten, Mr. Nicholson
(In attendance)

Apologies: Lord Thorneycroft, Mr. Peyton, Mr. Maudling, Mr. Gilmour

1. Business of the Week

Mrs. Thatcher outlined the proposed business of the House for the week after the Easter Recess, 7th - 11th April.

On Monday there would be a debate on a Motion to approve the White Paper on Britain's Membership of the European Community (Mr. Whitelaw). This would be followed by the remaining stages of the Reservoirs Bill (Mr. Speed), and the Criminal Procedure (Scotland) Bill.

On Tuesday Mr. Ivor Clemitson would seek leave to introduce his Local Government (Enabling) Bill under the 10 Minute Rule, and the European Debate would be continued (Mrs. Thatcher).

On Wednesday Mr. Philip Whitehead would seek leave to introduce his Cruelty to Animals Act 1876 (Amendment) Bill under the 10 Minute Rule, and the European Debate would be concluded. (Mr. Kirk and Mr. Maudling). There would be a free vote.

On Thursday there would be the Second Reading of the Referendum Bill (Mr. Payton and Sir Michael Havers), with a three-line Whip.

On Friday there would be Private Members' Motions.

It was understood that the Budget was fixed for 15th April.

2. Europe Debate

Mr. Whitelaw said that Mr. Wilson was likely to open the first day's debate, while Mr. Callaghan would wind up on the third day; dissenting Cabinet Ministers would be permitted to express their views from the second (PPS's) bench; other Ministers in the Cabinet majority would not speak, except for Mr. Hattersley and Mr. Peart. It was agreed that it was important to get across the message that the former Conservative Cabinet and the present Shadow Cabinet (and the great majority of the Parliamentary Party) had been united on the EEC issue.

/It was not

It was not originally proposed that there should be Conservative Front Bench winding-up speeches on the first and second days of the debate so as to give more time for back benchers to speak. Several members, however, thought it was important to use wind-up speeches to reply to points made by dissenting Cabinet Ministers and to deal with specific aspects such as industry and defence. It was agreed that there would therefore be wind-up speeches, and that the time at which they should begin would be discussed with the Business Committee.

3. EEC Referendum Campaign

Mr. Whitelaw reported on the inaugural meeting of the Britain in Europe Movement, and encouraging developments in Scotland and Wales. There was a discussion during which the following points were made. The role of the media might not be decisive and the Referendum could be won or lost on the doorstep. It was important that the Conservative Party "delivered" its own vote in support of staying in the EEC as no other organisation could act as an effective substitute. Some constituencies would be more willing and able to canvass all Conservative supporters than others. It was important that Conservatives did not stir up Labour areas; similarly, rural constituencies should beware of Liberals canvassing Conservative voters under guise of the Referendum campaign.

There was some evidence that more Conservative supporters would be on holiday in late June and it would be similarly inconvenient to have the Referendum during the week of the Spring Bank Holiday. There was an exchange of views on the Party's attitude if the Government tried to hold the Referendum at the end of May or beginning of June.

It was suggested that, rather than Mrs. Thatcher writing to Constituency Chairmen to reinforce the Party Chairman's appeal to them, it might be better to circulate suitable extracts from one of her speeches on the EEC.

4. Financial Assistance to Opposition Parties

As the first instalment of the £150,000 promised to the Conservative Party was imminent, it was agreed that a Sub-Committee, chaired by Sir Keith Joseph and including Mr. Maude and Sir Geoffrey Howe, should consider how this could most effectively be allocated.

5. The Attorney General and Clay Cross

There was a short discussion of what the Party might do about the Attorney General's behaviour in sponsoring the Housing Finance (Special Provisions) Bill after his earlier advice in Opposition.

6. Select Committee on Science and Technology: Energy Resources Sub-Committee

It was agreed that Mr. Jenkin should not accept the invitation to give evidence to this sub-committee.

7. Supply Days

Early debates on the docks situation and housing were suggested.

The Meeting adjourned at 6.10 p.m.