

THE NATIONAL UNION OF CONSERVATIVE AND UNIONIST ASSOCIATIONS

Minutes of the Executive Committee Meeting

Thursday 13th November 1980

The Committee met at 32 Smith Square, Westminster on Thursday 13th November 1980 at 2.15 p.m. under the chairmanship of Sir Charles Johnston, TD. The names of the 125 members present are recorded.

1. Chairman's opening remarks

The Chairman informed members of the death during the Party Conference week of the Baroness Emmett, a Vice-President of the National Union, having been its Chairman in 1955/56, WNAC Chairman 1951/54, MP for East Grinstead 1955/64 and Deputy Speaker and Deputy Chairman of Committees in the House of Lords. The National Union's sympathy had been expressed to the family and a memorial service would be held on 10th December in St Margaret's, Westminster. Members stood in silent tribute.

Sir Harry Boyne was welcomed as the new Director of Communications and the Committee's thanks were recorded to the retiring Director, Mr Gordon Reece. The Chairman also welcomed Mr Gordon Whiting as the new Chairman of the National Society of Agents.

2. Apologies for absence

Apologies from 20 members were noted and recorded.

3. Minutes of the last meeting

The Minutes of the meeting held on 10th July, which had been circulated with the agenda, were approved and signed by the Chairman.

4. Business arising from the Minutes

(a) Members were informed that Mr James Scott-Hopkins, MEP was unable to speak because he had an audience with the Pope today. At short notice, Rt Hon. John Biffen, MP was asked if he could come to speak about Government expenditure and he kindly agreed to do so.

(b) The Secretary read a reply from Rt Hon. John Nott, MP to the Committee's congratulations on the way he had handled the allocation of airway routes to Hong Kong.

5. Report from the General Purposes Committee

The Chairman reported that the General Purposes Committee yesterday had a lengthy and useful discussion on the 1980 Party Conference, which would be dealt with on the next item in today's agenda. The Committee had considered the South Eastern Area resolution (item 15 on today's supplementary agenda) and were opposed to items (a) and (b) but in favour of returning to two balloted motions. They were also opposed to TV cameras being allowed into Area receptions and to any change in constituency representation. The Standing Review Committee had now been asked to consider some form of registration fee or payment for the Conference handbook to offset the cost of printing. Reports from the seven NACs had been received. Mr Alistair McAlpine had reported that despite money-raising difficulties the CBF subscriptions at £1.5m had exceeded the target to date, but only 28% of the quota

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target had been contributed, representing some £1m in arrears to date, and spoke of the considerable advantages of interest-free or low-interest loans from constituency Associations to help the cash flow and of economies in expenditure. He had also reported that the Agents' Employment Advisory Committee had agreed to a 6% increase in the Agents' salary scale. Sir David Davenport-Handley, OBE, JP, DL had reported on the very flourishing state of the National Agricultural and Countryside Forum. The Prime Minister hoped to attend the Central Council Meeting in the City Hall, Cardiff starting at 2.15 p.m. on Friday 27th March 1981. For the Saturday afternoon session the GP Committee agreed that Rt Hon. Sir Keith Joseph, Bt, MP, Rt Hon. John Nott, MP and a Minister from the Treasury should be invited to form a panel for a discussion on industry. Civic and Wales Area receptions would be held on the Friday evening. Motions for the agenda were required by 12th February and Areas were asked to help in originating some good ones. Handbooks and tickets would be issued on 12th March only to those who apply. Nomination papers for the election of National Union Officers would be issued on 7th January for return by 23rd January, followed by a postal ballot between 2nd and 14th February, and the Committee had given its unanimous support to the Officers' recommendation that Rt Hon. Edward du Cann, MP, Chairman of the 1922 Committee and a former Party Chairman, should be asked to stand as President for the ensuing year.

The Committee then unanimously approved the nomination of Mr Du Cann as NU President for 1981/82 and the GP's recommendation that TV cameras should not be allowed into Area receptions in future. They also approved the proposed programme for the Central Council Saturday afternoon session.

#### 6. Review of the 1980 Party Conference at Brighton

The Chairman congratulated Dame Ann Springman, DBE on her excellent chairmanship and Sir Theo Constantine, CBE, AE, DL as President, and this was received with acclamation. He reported generally favourable comments on the Conference, but of course the media considered it monotonous after the excitement at Blackpool the previous week and one political commentator referred to "the bland leading the bland".

Two members of the Parliamentary Party had written to say they thought the motions ought to have more "bite" from the public relations aspect and these had been referred to in detail at the GP Committee yesterday; but it was probably right that the Conference should have been comparatively low key this year while results of Government policies working through the economic system were still being awaited and there were no major disagreements on policy. Reports from TV viewers had been good and the Secretary had not received the usual complaints from this source. Organisationally, the Conference went very smoothly and the time-table had been maintained, thus enabling a record number of 168 representatives being called to speak. Members would note from the statistics on copy "B" that these were spread reasonably well over all the Areas and sections of the Party, with more than usual from Scotland, Northern and the Midlands.

The Committee congratulated Mr Michael Taylor on the great success of the financial appeal resulting in £9,902, of which over £5,000 was donated on the cheque forms issued at the Conference - originally the idea of Mr John Lacy - and paid tribute to the indispensable help given by Central Office staff, particularly Mr John Lacy as Chief Steward and Mr Alan Leonard as Head of Promotions. The Committee warmly thanked the Secretary, Mr Alan Smith and his team, and the Interglobe Security Officers.

In the further discussion seven members spoke on an incident outside the Conference hall in which a representative's badge had been ripped off by demonstrators, the "rather bland" nature of the resolutions debated, the police presence on the Friday, TV coverage which had a very good effect on viewers and conveyed a sense of responsibility, the need for reserved seats for disabled people on Friday afternoon, and favourable reaction to the speakers and debates. The Chairman said that he had spoken in "The World at One" in reply to a charge of "Conference-rigging" in a report in the "Times" from which the Conservative Graduates Society and the Bow Group had subsequently dissociated themselves. He read a letter received from an MEP deploring the change in date of the 1981 Conference.

7. Representation to Central Council and Party Conference

The Committee was informed that the Lewes Association had again raised the question of CPC representation to the Conference, suggesting that either they should have a representative by right or the representation should be left entirely to the constituency Association. The Secretary had also had several complaints from voluntary workers who are Honorary Secretaries of Associations but are not entitled to attend the Conference in place of certificated Agents, although they were offered observer's tickets if they could not attend as one of the seven representatives. It was unanimously decided that there should be no change in representation.

8. Consideration of resolutions received from Area, Constituency and other organisations

The Committee approved the action taken on the 10 resolutions shown on copy "C" and the 5 on the supplementary agenda circulated at the meeting. The GP Committee had considered resolution 15 from the South Eastern Area Provincial Council and recommended that there should be two balloted motions and this was agreed; but the other two proposals were considered impracticable and it was decided, with one member objecting, that there should be no further discussion on the matter at this meeting. A member requested that resolution 14 on defence expenditure should also be forwarded to the Chancellor of the Exchequer and this was agreed.

9. Agents' salary scales for 1981

Invited by the Chairman, Mr Alistair McAlpine, Chairman of the Agents' Employment Advisory Committee, reported that the Agents' salary scales for 1981 represented a 6% increase on the appropriate scale and this had been accepted as a minimum by the Agents. Anomalies had been tidied up, a sickness insurance scheme through BUPA or an appropriate agency was recommended and Agents involved in local government elections should be awarded an election fee. He was grateful to the National Society of Agents for their co-operation. Mr Gordon Whiting stressed that the 6% increase should be regarded as a minimum and hoped that Agents would get a better deal in the next salary review. Mr Oulton Wade suggested that the Committee's appreciation to the Agents for the way they had accepted the new scale should be recorded. Mr Colin Turner suggested using the expression "at least" rather than "minimum" in regard to the increase.

10. Membership of the National Union

Applications under Rule III (b) from the British Conservative Association in France and the British Conservative Association in Belgium for approval as recognised Conservative bodies were considered. The Rt Hon. Baroness Elles had written to support the application from the Association in France and the Secretary referred to correspondence received from both Associations. Following discussion in which 10 members gave their views, a motion for approval of both these Associations as recognised Conservative bodies was carried with two dissentients.

11. Joint Committee against Racism

Mr James Lemkin, GLC, Co-Chairman of this Committee, reported on its work over the past year, urging that members should not lose confidence in the groups working within the JCAR and to continue to support it with a financial contribution. A "Fact Sheet" was circulated, and after a short discussion the Committee agreed that a further donation of £200 should be sent to the Joint Committee.

12. Area Chairman's report

Mr Brian Tooke, JP, Chairman of Eastern Area, defined his Area and reported on the victories in the General Election in 39 Parliamentary seats and in the European elections in all seats. A certain amount of concern was felt about the current situation at Westminster. All County and a large number of District Councils

were Conservative controlled and morale was high; priority was now being given to organisational work for the next local government elections, to "Action in the 1980s" and to the problems of Parliamentary redistribution which seemed to be going the right way. Bedfordshire was a problem area. The Area was sorry to lose Peter Gower's services but were very happy with his successor, Bill Henderson, and a first-class Area team.

Mr Tooke was thanked with applause.

13. Alteration to the Rules of the Eastern Area Council

Mr Brian Tooke moved an amendment to Rule 4 of the Eastern Area Council concerning the constitution of the Council by the insertion of the following new subparagraph and this was approved:-

"The Leaders (or Deputies) of the Conservative Groups of all County and District Councils".

Mr Tooke suggested that to improve the relationship between Conservative Local Government Groups and the Party, representatives to the Central Council and to the Conference might be included from each local government association, and it was decided to refer this to the Standing Review Committee for consideration.

14. Disputes in the Thurrock and Bournemouth East Conservative Associations

The Committee received notice of a dispute submitted by the Executive Council of the Thurrock Association on which statements and correspondence had just been received and of a dispute from the Bournemouth East Association of which the Wessex Area Officers had failed to bring about an acceptable settlement, and decided that the National Union Officers should investigate both disputes and report back to the next meeting.

15. Business for the next meeting

The Committee decided to leave to the Officers the choice of a speaker for the next meeting on Thursday 15th January 1981.

16. Discussion on Government expenditure

The Chairman invited Rt Hon. John Biffen, MP, Chief Secretary to the Treasury, to lead this discussion. Mr Biffen stressed that the whole issue of public spending was central to the Government's position and this involved two separate exercises: (1) Volume programmes for 1981/82 had to be controlled at the projected level, and adjustments made necessary by the pressures of rising costs and the recession had to be offset by economies based on our resources. Only half of public sector spending was being required to make economies; the other half had a built-in protection. He urged the importance of taking a balanced political view. (2) The role of public sector pay, which accounted for 30/45% of local and 20/25% of central government expenditure was of crucial importance. Government policies were aimed at attempting to return to a sensible view of social democracy through achieving a proper relationship between public spending, levels of taxation and the consequent rate of borrowing. He referred to the acceleration of the sterling exchange rate and the risk involved in a minimum lending rate. He said North Sea oil was a powerful catalyst for change and the real debate was about how we should react to that change, whether by individual thought and action or a politically controlled philosophy. Securing a reduction in the minimum lending rate was a first imperative, and the business community would be better placed if we adhered to policies that were rooted in realism. Mr Biffen answered 9 questions from members and was warmly thanked by the Chairman for his excellent speech and the conviction which he conveyed.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 4.15 p.m.