

LEADER'S CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

Minutes of the 128th Meeting held at 3.00 p.m. on Monday, 26th July, 1976, in the Leader's Room at the House of Commons

Present: Mrs. Thatcher (in the Chair)

Mr. Whitelaw, Sir Keith Joseph, Lord Carrington, Mr. Maudling, Sir Geoffrey Howe, Mr. Pym, Mr. Gilmour, Mr. Jenkin, Mr. Payton, Mr. St. John-Stevas, Mr. Eassey, Mr. Raison, Mr. Maude, Mr. Buchanan-Smith, Mr. Edwards, Mr. Neave, Mrs. Oppenheim, Mr. Biffen, Lord Thorneycroft

Mr. Atkins

In attendance: Sir Peter Kirk, Mr. Nott, Mr. Higgins, Mr. Stanley, Mr. Butler, Mr. Patten, Mr. Douglas, Mr. Ridley, Mr. Nicholson

Apologies: Lord Hailsham, Mr. Prior

First Draft of a Policy Document

1. There was a general discussion as to whether to publish a document on the lines suggested. The following points were agreed:

(i) We should publish a document of this general nature before the Party Conference. We should explain why we were producing such a statement at this time and why it did not necessarily cover every issue. We should take care not to put too much detail in it.

(ii) The existing draft needed to be generally remodelled so as to bring out more effectively certain themes, viz.

- that the role of government, and the burden it imposes on free enterprise, is too large;
- that taxation is too high and limits choice;
- that ownership of property is desirable in itself;
- that social values and family life should be encouraged;
- that quality and merit need to be recognised and rewarded;
- that we should respond to the increasing concern being shown for the maintenance of law and order and of the authority of Parliament;
- that we wished to see free trade unions playing a responsible role in society.

(iii) These themes would be stated at an early stage in the document and would be referred to later as appropriate in the discussion of various subjects.

(iv) The document should be significantly shorter than this first draft.

(v) It was desirable that it should be substantially the work of one or two draftsmen, taking account of the views expressed in discussion and in written amendment, rather than be redrafted by a committee.

2. There followed a general discussion of the contents of the document. In addition, various members had indicated or were indicating to Mr. Maude and Mr. Patten the changes they wished to see made. Among the points agreed in discussion were the following:

(i) The challenge to the authority of Parliament should be referred to in the section on our philosophy at the beginning, and we should spell out the problem and our response at the start of the section "People, Parliament and the Law" before moving on to immigration and law and order.

(ii) Among the sections that required redrafting were those on the common agricultural policy, profit sharing (where we should emphasise that we wished the adoption of schemes to be voluntary), and tax credits where we should seek to emphasise how this would affect not only taxation but also social services.

(iii) The passage on Europe should be strengthened and our positive commitment to the development of a more united Europe emphasised. We should not however spell out any changes we wished to see in the European institutions, and we should be careful not to say anything which might antagonise the Christian Democrat parties with whom we wished to co-operate.

(iv) Possible omissions from the first draft which we might wish to refer to in the final draft were: reference to our desire to have less legislation, to the problem of overmanning (indicating that reducing overmanning does not necessarily mean more unemployment), and to the general problem of unemployment, especially with regard to school leavers.

3. Arrangements for Publication of a Document

There was a discussion. It was agreed that Mr. Maude should consult with our advisers on publicity with regard to the precise timing of publication during the week before the Party Conference.

4. Next meeting

It was agreed that there would be a meeting at 5.15 p.m. on Wednesday, 4th August, to discuss the second draft of the document. Mr. Maude and Mr. Patten would thereafter be responsible for redrafting the document in the light of that discussion. There would also be a meeting at 11.00 a.m. in Central Office on Monday, 2nd August to discuss various further reports from policy groups.