

CONFIDENTIAL

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LEADER'S CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

82ND MEETING

4.45 p.m., Wednesday 12th November, 1975

in the Leader's Room at the House of Commons

AGENDA

1. Minutes of the 81st Meeting - to follow.
2. Future Business.
3. Devolution - paper by Mr. Whitelaw, LCC/75/87 - attached.
4. Any other business.

Conservative Research Department,
24 Old Queen Street, LONDON, S.W.1.

CFP/SMN
6.11.75

LEADER'S CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

Minutes of the 81st Meeting held at 5.00 p.m.
on Wednesday, 5th November 1975, in the
Leader's Room at the House of Commons

Present: Mrs. Thatcher (in the Chair)
Sir Keith Joseph, Mr. Maudling,
Sir Geoffrey Howe, Mr. Gilmour,
Lord Carrington, Mr. Erior, Mr. Peyton,
Mr. St. John-Stevas, Mr. Heseltine,
Mr. Raison, Mr. Maude, Mr. Buchanan-Smith,
Mr. Neave, Mr. Younger, Mr. Fowler,
Mrs. Oppenheim, Mr. Jopling,
Lord Thorneycroft
Mr. Atkins

In attendance: Mr. Lamont (for Item 3)
Mr. Shelton, Mr. Montgomery
Mr. Forman, Mr. Ridley, Mr. Nicholson

Apologies: Mr. Whitelaw, Lord Hailsham,
Mr. Jenkin, Mr. Edwards

1. Proposed Business for the Week 10-12th November

On Monday 10th November there would be a debate on Foreign Affairs (Mr. Maudling, Mr. Tugendhat), and this would be followed by proceedings on the Airports Authority Bill (Mr. Awdry).

On Tuesday 11th November Mr. Frank Allaun would seek leave to introduce his Mortgages (Low Income Earners) Bill under the 10 Minute Rule. This would be followed by the Lords Amendments to the Community Land Bill (Mr. Raison, Mr. Rossi), and by a Motion on the Compensation for Limitation of Prices (Post Office) Order.

On Wednesday 12th November Mr. Robin Corbett would seek leave to introduce his Licensing Act (Amendment) Bill under the 10 Minute Rule. This would be followed by consideration of any Lords Amendments which may be received, and by a resumed debate on Welsh Affairs (Mr. Edwards in charge), with prorogation at about 8 o'clock.

2. Matters Arising on Business

Lord Carrington reported on the position in the House of Lords with regard to the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Amendment) Bill, on which the Lords had defeated the Government over two amendments moved by Lord Hailsham and Lord Goodman. While these two amendments were to some extent complementary, they differed in scope. After a short discussion, it was agreed that it would be right for the Lords to insist on both of them.

3. Metriation

Mrs. Oppenheim introduced her paper (LCC (75) 85). The Government was proposing to amend the Weights and Measures Act

(1963) to enable it to fix terminal dates for the use of Imperial units. It was feared that after this amendment, the crucial orders for metrication would come before Parliament late at night or in committee for a very limited period, and would not therefore be adequately discussed. She proposed that we should vote against the amendment, thus seeking to deny the Government a blank cheque for metrication as and when they wished. We should suggest instead that the Government proceed with a published timetable and with procedures approved by Parliament only after proper debate on costs and consumer safeguards.

There was a discussion in which opinions were expressed for and against Mrs. Oppenheim's case, and the following points were made:

- (a) In view of our commitment given to the EEC not to discriminate against the use of metric units by 1975 and to metricate by 1979, and in view of the progress already made towards metrication in industry, it was impractical to turn back and it would be difficult to take an attitude different to the one which we expressed in Government.
- (b) The cost of metrication was very substantial, although some doubts were expressed about the estimate of £5,000 m. given in 1973.
- (c) Perhaps without voting against the amendment to the Weights and Measures Act, we might confine ourselves to pointing out the difficulties of proceeding at the pace envisaged by the Government, especially at a time of such high inflation.
- (d) Reference was made to the parallel with decimalisation, when there had been a rounding up of costs as a result of the changeover, and we had taken the blame for a measure initiated by the previous Labour Government.

It was agreed that we should resist any attempt by the Government to metricate "by stealth and by night", without full parliamentary debate and publication of timetable procedures. However, we could not further commit ourselves to a view until we had examined the Government's Bill.

4. Political Activities of Civil Servants

The Prime Minister had written to Mrs. Thatcher on 22nd October stating that the Government had been considering whether the rules governing the political activities of civil servants might be liberalised, in particular to permit the executive officers and lower grades more freedom to engage in political activity. It appeared that Government officials, presumably on behalf of the Government, had indicated willingness to accept the proposals made by the Staff Side. The Prime Minister's letter conveyed the impression that it was the Government's intention, in giving evidence to Lord Salmon's Royal Commission on Standards of Conduct in Public Life, to "confirm" this offer.

There was a discussion in which reference was made to the fact that executive officers frequently served in Ministers' private offices, and that there might be a danger of our

moving towards the American practice whereby senior civil servants and officials in private offices were changed upon the election of a new Government.

It was agreed that we should oppose any such liberalisation of the rules on political activity and that Mrs. Thatcher would write to the Prime Minister, after consulting with Lord Hailsham and other colleagues, expressing this view. Her letter might perhaps refer to the statement in the last paragraph of his letter that the Government attached importance to the Civil Service maintaining its reputation for political impartiality, something which would be jeopardised if the Government went ahead with the Staff Side proposal. It was also agreed that we should try to establish whether Lord Salmon's Royal Commission had ruled the matter outside its terms of reference as had been already reported in one newspaper. It was further agreed that we would reply to the Prime Minister's letter on the private basis on which it had been sent but that we would be prepared to publicise the issue if it became clear that the Government was intending to carry out the proposal.

5. Other Business

It was agreed that if asked to comment on the Chrysler situation, we should say that we were in no position to judge for the time being as we were not in possession of the full facts.

The meeting closed at 6.12 p.m.

Proposed Addenda to the Minutes of the 81st Meeting of the
Leader's Consultative Committee, Wednesday 5th November
1975.

Page 2 at the end of (b) insert: however, it was not possible
to give any alternative estimates nor was it established that
the cost would be less.

Page 2 at the end of (d) insert the following paragraph:
~~The majority of those opinions expressed, were in favour of
the general approach advocated in Mrs. Oppenheim's Paper.~~

*There was
general approval*