

LEADER'S CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

Minutes of the 51st Meeting held at 5.00 p.m. on
Wednesday, 26th February 1975, in the Leader's
Room at the House of Commons

Present: Mrs. Thatcher (In the Chair)
Mr. Whitelaw, Sir Keith Joseph,
Mr. Maudling, Sir Geoffrey Howe,
Mr. Gilmour, Mr. Pym, Mr. Jenkin,
Mr. Peyton, Mr. St. John-Stevas,
Mr. Heseltine, Mr. Raison, Mr. Buchanan-Smith,
Mr. Edwards, Mr. Neave, Mr. Younger,
Mr. Fowler, Mrs. Oppenheim, Lord Thorneycroft,
Mr. Maude
Mr. Atkins
Lord Fraser (Secretary)
Sir Michael Havers, Mr. Montgomery,
Mr. Shelton, Mr. Wolff, Mr. Patten,
Mr. Ridley, Mr. Sherbourne,
(In attendance)

Apologies: Lord Hailsham, Lord Carrington, Mr. Prior

1. Mrs. Thatcher welcomed Lord Thorneycroft and Mr. Angus Maude to the Committee.

2. Business of the Week

Mrs. Thatcher outlined the proposed Business of the House for the week 3rd-7th March, and Monday, 10th March.

On Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, there would be progress on the Report Stage of the Finance Bill (Sir Geoffrey Howe and team).

On Thursday, there would either be further progress on the Report Stage of the Finance Bill or a debate on the White Paper on the Referendum. This would be followed by the Remaining Stages of the Reservoirs Bill (Lords), and consideration of the Criminal Procedure (Scotland) Bill (Lords), the Statute Law (Repeals) Bill (Lords) and Supply Powers Bill (Lords).

Friday would be devoted to Private Members' Motions.

Monday, 10th March, would probably be the final day of the Report Stage of the Finance Bill.

3. Finance Bill

The Committee had to decide a line for weekend speeches and whether or not there should be a running three-line Whip for all five days.

A discussion took place. It was agreed that the Chief Whip should organise a stiff two-line Whip. Sir Geoffrey Howe would try and give some indication at the beginning of the week of points at which the Whip might be peaked. If necessary, a new Whip would be issued on Monday for Tuesday and Wednesday.

/ Mrs. Thatcher

Mrs. Thatcher pointed out that the Chairmen of all the Parliamentary Committees were present and that they would all be involved in the debate as the tax affected small businesses, farms, forestry, charities, inheritance, and so on, and she asked them to alert their Committees. There was a possibility that Thursday's business, if on the Finance Bill, would run on into Friday. The Government had put down 83 amendments and were putting down more before the weekend.

The general burden of speeches at the weekend should be that the capital transfer tax was an iniquitous tax, ill thought out, which was being introduced without consideration of other capital taxes, and that the Government were aiming to push it through without any thought of the consequences.

The Research Department were producing a brief, listing the amendments which had been moved by the Opposition in Committee, giving the background and voting, and this would be available in the Whips Office. They were also producing a more general brief for speakers not wanting to go into the more technical details.

Our strategy would be to try and make reasonable progress at the beginning of the week and fight hard at the end of the week. We would, of course, be accused of fighting the capital transfer tax on behalf of the rich, but this tax was particularly hard on small businesses and small farmers.

The terms of an amendment drawing attention to the large number of Government amendments and the short time allowed for their consideration was discussed.

4. White Paper on the Referendum

The Government might decide to debate this on Thursday. It was agreed that the main Opposition speakers should be Mr. Peyton and Sir Michael Havers.

There was a discussion. It was felt that paragraph 36 was unacceptable.

Although the general feeling of the meeting was that the count should be carried out centrally, the point was made that whichever system was used, it would be exploited by the nationalists and we should, as far as possible, keep out of this argument. The question of postal votes for British residents abroad was discussed.

So far as the debate itself was concerned, our main attack would be on the principle of holding a referendum rather than the details of organising it. It was felt that if we argued on the details we would be seen as giving tacit acceptance to the idea of a referendum. There was also a feeling that we should not impede the Bill unduly, which would go through anyway, and thereby put ourselves in a difficult position for the actual referendum campaign. We did not want to appear to be filibustering and should concentrate on raising legitimate points.

It was agreed to have a three-line Whip on the White Paper and the Second Reading of the Bill.

5. State Finance for Political Parties

The Chief Whip reported on his meeting with the 1922 Committee at which there had been some opposition to the idea of the Party receiving Government assistance, even though it would be confined to Parliamentary work, and despite the fact that we already accepted financial help for the Leader's and Chief Whip's Offices. The Labour Party Parliamentary Party were expected to discuss it on 12th March and the Government were expected to bring forward a motion, together with one on Members' interests, before Easter.

6. Spokesmen

There was a short discussion about Front-bench spokesmen speaking on subjects other than their own from the back benches. In general, it was felt that this should not be prevented, but equally not encouraged, when Back-benchers wanted to speak.

7. Future Policy

Mrs. Thatcher said that she was considering calling an all-day meeting to discuss fundamental ideas and issues. This would probably take place on Friday, 11th April in Central Office. Sir Keith Joseph and Mr. Maude would prepare papers for the meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 5.50 p.m.



PRIVY COUNCIL OFFICE
WHITEHALL, LONDON SW1A 2AT

3 December 1974

The Rt Hon Humphrey Atkins MP
House of Commons
LONDON
SW1A 0AA

Humphrey Atkins

You will recall that in my statement on 29 July I announced the Government's intention to set up an independent committee to look into the question of financial assistance for political parties outside Parliament. I said at the time that I would consult the opposition parties after the recess about the terms of reference.

The terms we propose are: "To consider whether, in the interests of Parliamentary democracy, provision should be made from public funds to assist political parties in carrying out their functions outside Parliament; to examine the practice of other Parliamentary democracies in this field, and to make recommendations as to the scope of political activities to which any such provision should relate, and the method of its allocation". I should be grateful if you could let me know by the end of this week whether you are content. I apologise for the short notice, but I would like to announce the setting up of this Committee next week.

I would also welcome a suggestion from you for a member of your party to be a member of the Committee. The sort of person we have in mind would be someone who would not assume a rigid party political stance, but who would be helpful in presenting the issues involved to the public. I have invited Lord Boyle to take the chair.

As I said before, I would appreciate an early reply on this, so that we can go ahead as quickly as possible.

Humphrey Atkins

Lord Boyle



PRIVY COUNCIL OFFICE
WHITERHALL, LONDON SW1A 2AT
27 February 1975

The Rt Hon Humphrey Atkins MP
House of Commons
LONDON
SW1A 0AA

Humphrey Atkins

We are now ready to establish the independent Committee which is to examine the question of the allocation of public funds to political parties outside Parliament. Lord Houghton has agreed to chair this Committee.

I should therefore be grateful if you could let me have, in the near future, your Party's suggestion for a member of the Committee, as I requested in my letter to you of 3 December.

Yours sincerely,
Lee