

LEADER'S CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

Minutes of the 90th Meeting held at 5.00 p.m.  
on Tuesday, 6th January 1976, 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  
Lord Carrington, Mr. Payton  
Mr. Heseltine, Mr. Raison  
Mr. Maude, Mr. Buchanan-Smith  
Mr. Neave, Mr. Younger  
Mr. Fowler, Mr. Jopling  
Lord Thorneycroft

Mr. Atkins

In attendance: Sir Michael Havers, Mr. Butler  
Mr. Patten, Mr. Ridley  
Mr. Wolfers, Mr. Wynn  
Mr. Nicholson

Apologies: Lord Hailsham, Mr. Gilmour  
Mr. Prior, Mr. Jenkin  
Mr. St. John-Stevas  
Mr. Edwards, Mrs. Oppenheim

(The business for the week 12-19th January was listed  
in the minutes of the 89th meeting.)

1. Matters Arising on Business

Mr. Kilroy-Silk had put down a Private Member's Motion for Friday, 16th January, to make tobacco a medicine and therefore subject to medicinal control. It was thought that Dr. Owen, the Minister responsible, might be sympathetic to the Motion. It was agreed that we should speak against it, not least because of its implications for Government control of industry and for the borrowing requirement, but that, as many Members were not likely to be present that day, we should tell the Government that it was primarily their responsibility either to talk the Motion out or to muster enough support to defeat it.

2. Debate on Northern Ireland: January 12th 1976

Mr. Neave introduced his paper (LCC/76/95). He was seeing Mr. Rees on Thursday, 8th January to discover what the Government's approach would be, but it was thought likely that the Government would propose the recall of the Convention to reconsider various points. He proposed that we should adopt Short-term Option 3 on page 2 of his paper: viz, that we should accept sections of the report and support the recall of the Convention. We could point out that we were not opposed to the restoration of the office of Governor and of the Northern Ireland Privy Council, but perhaps a better title for the former would be 'Queen's Representative'. This would be an independent figure who would appoint the

Chief Executive rather than the Secretary of State doing so. We might also say that we were not opposed to a Bill of Rights.

There was a full discussion. Mr. Neave's approach was agreed and the following points, relevant to Monday's debate, were also agreed:

- a) Although it was thought that all the Northern Ireland parties would the Assembly to control the police, we should avoid any commitment on this issue without seeming to turn it down out of hand.
- b) We should reiterate the criticisms of the Government's attitude to security which Mr. Neave - speaking for the Shadow Cabinet - had frequently made in the past, and we should press for immediate and vigorous measures to restore military, police and civilian morale in South Armagh.
- c) We should not press for a specific increase in the number of Northern Ireland MPs at Westminster; such an increase might prejudice the outcome of the next General Election. We could only support an increase in the number of Northern Ireland MPs if a coalition executive were established in Northern Ireland.
- d) We should not press for a return to detention, but should urge Mr. Rees to use his existing powers to detain people in the interests of security. We should contrast the timing of his release of detainees with our proposals for release in 1973, against the background of a strengthening rather than weakening security situation.
- e) We should draw attention to our helpful attitude to the Government on the Northern Ireland question.
- f) We should seek to correct the prevalent impression that the Conservative Government's administration of Northern Ireland marked simply a further phase in the deterioration of the situation there. Our record of policy and administration in Northern Ireland was better than Labour's; the situation was improving in late 1973 and the improvement was brought to an end by the success of the Ulster workers' strike.

It was understood that Mr. Neave and Mr. Whitelaw, in consultation with other colleagues, would be ready to comment on any developments over the weekend in Mrs. Thatcher's absence. There might have to be a further meeting of the Shadow Cabinet on Monday if there had been any significant developments likely to affect the debate, at the end of which we did not at this stage propose to vote.

#### 4. Devolution

There had been changes in the Government speakers proposed for the four-day debate. On Tuesday, 13th January, Mr. Wilson would open and there would be no wind-up; on Wednesday, 14th January, Mr. Short and Mr. Fowler would speak; on Thursday, 15th January, Mr. Dell and the Lord Advocate would speak; and on Monday, 19th January, Mr. Morris and Mr. Ross would speak. It was agreed that our order of speakers should be as follows: on Tuesday, Mrs. Thatcher; on Wednesday, Mr. Buchanan-Smith and Sir Michael Havers; on Thursday, Mr. Edwards and Mr. Rifkind; and on Monday, Sir David Renton and Mr. Whitelaw.

It was agreed that our line for the debate should be that we were committed to an Assembly for Scotland but that we were opposed to a separate Executive. Our objections to the separate Executive were based on clear grounds, viz., that it detracted from the authority of the Westminster Parliament, while we would wish an assembly to fit into the proceedings of that Parliament; that it meant more government, more costly government and more civil servants; and that it gave many opportunities for conflict between the UK Government and the Scottish Executive. It was likely to lead to further demands for separatism. On Wales, there was a fundamental disagreement with the Government in that we were opposed to an Assembly.

We should base our position on the last two manifestoes. We should avoid committing ourselves to a referendum on the issue of Scottish independence, as there were endless problems over the wording and the constituency of such a referendum. We should not express support for proportional representation (PR) for the Scottish Assembly, as it would compromise our position on PR at Westminster. We might challenge Scottish Nationalists to behave responsibly in the proposed Scottish Assembly and ask them whether they would work constitutionally within its terms of reference.

It was also agreed that this was not the issue for our main attack on the Government.

With regard to an amendment to the Government's "take note" Motion, it was agreed that a decision should be made at the Shadow Cabinet meeting on Wednesday, 14th January, in the light of what the Prime Minister had said and of other speeches in the two days of debate.

5. Immigration

There was a discussion arising from the revelation that the originally published official figures for 1973 had greatly underestimated immigration. It was agreed that we should draw attention to the fact that Mr. Gilmour had discovered the error in the official figures and had made a speech on 25th November, which had been circulated to the press, in which he had noted this fact. It was also agreed that we would need to consider our approach to this subject, which was likely to become more important in the coming months.

The meeting closed at 7.00 p.m.