

LEADER'S CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

Minutes of the 109th Meeting held at 5.00 pm.
on Wednesday, 5th May 1976, in the Leader's
Room at the House of Commons.

Present: Mrs. Thatcher (in the Chair)

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

In attendance: Mr. Butler, Mr. Stanley,
Mr. Patten, Mr. Ridley,
Mr. Nicholson, Mr. Wynn.

Apologies: Mr. Jenkin, Mr. Heseltine.

1. Proposed Business for the Week 10th-14th May

On Monday, 10th May, there would be the Remaining Stages of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill (Mr. Speed, Mr. Morris) and of the Agriculture (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill (Mr. Pym, Mr. Jopling).

On Tuesday, 11th May, Mr. Tony Durant would seek leave to introduce his Parliamentary Commissioner for the Nationalised Industries Bill under the 10 Minute Rule. This would be followed by Progress in Committee on the Finance Bill (Sir Geoffrey Howe).

On Wednesday, 12th May, Mr. Nicholas Fairbairn would seek leave to introduce his Criminal Profits (Expropriation) Bill under the 10 Minute Rule. This would be followed by a Supply Day with a subject to be decided and by a Prayer on the National Freight Corporation (Commencing Capital Debt) Order (Mr. Fowler).

On Thursday, 13th May, there would be further progress in Committee on the Finance Bill (Sir Geoffrey Howe).

On Friday, 14th May, there would be Private Members' Bills: the Remaining Stages of Mr. Peter Thomas's Dangerous Wild Animals Bill and Mr. Andrew Bowden's Food and Drugs (Control of Food Premises) Bill and the Second Reading of the Mr. Stephen Ross's and Mr. Graham Page's Bills.

2. Subjects for Future Supply Days

There was a discussion and it was agreed that:

i) We would debate the estimates for the Royal Navy on 12th May.

ii) It was desirable to seek to debate the following subjects on future Supply Days (or half Supply Days):- rural transport; the situation in Cambodia; compulsory purchase; the future of London's dockland; the Lancaster University report on educational standards; the Price Check scheme and the Government's handling of prices policy.

iii) Members were invited to prepare, in conjunction with the Research Department, for possible early debates on the above subjects.

3. Reception of Commonwealth Immigrants

Mr. Whitelaw reported on the difficulties that had arisen when immigrants with British passports arrived at Gatwick and Heathrow airports as part of the quota but without funds. Some embarrassment had been caused by arrangements made by the relevant local authorities to house some of these immigrants temporarily.

It was agreed that we should examine the practical aspects of reception of such immigrants, and investigate whether central Government might help with cheaper temporary accommodation.

4. Foreign Affairs

Mr. Maudling reported that the present session of the Law of the Sea Conference would end in two days. It was agreed that we should press for an early statement. The SHADOW CABINET endorsed Mr. Maudling's intention to visit Southern Africa.

5. Devolution and the Scottish Conference

Mr. Whitelaw reported on the line that he would take in his speech to the Scottish Party Conference, 13th-15th May, adding that he had consulted a wide range of Scottish MPs, candidates and constituency chairmen.

There was a discussion and Mr. Whitelaw's general approach was agreed, viz:

i) It was not desirable to renege on our commitment to a directly elected Scottish Assembly.

ii) If we remained firm on (i) we should be in a position to be able to vote against the Government Bill on devolution whenever it came forward. It was not desirable to set up an extra and expensive tier of Government, and we saw the Scottish Assembly as assisting the work of the Westminster Parliament on Scottish business, operating perhaps as a "third" House of Parliament. A reservation was expressed, however, about whether all our Scottish MPs would be prepared to vote against the Government Bill.

iii) Before pursuing the question of the number of Scottish seats at either the Speaker's Conference or in Committee on the Devolution Bill, we should investigate whether it would, in fact, be to our advantage to reduce the number of seats in Scotland.

iv) Although the Constitutional Committee had not supported the idea of a referendum on devolution, we should not rule this out as a long term possibility.

v) Mr. Whitelaw would explain his approach to the Executive of the 1922 Committee on the following night and would explain it to the Constitutional Committee on Thursday, 13th May.

6. Future meetings

It was agreed to meet to discuss reports from Policy Groups on the following dates: Monday 7th June 3.00-6.00 pm; Monday 21st June 3.00-6.00 pm; Friday 2nd July 10.00-1.00 pm; and Monday 12th July 3.00-6.00 pm.

7. Agriculture in Wales

Mr. Edwards referred to his paper, Responsibility for Agriculture in Wales (LCC/75/109) and said that in a speech on Saturday, 8th May, he wished to express support for the proposal to transfer the responsibility for Welsh agriculture to the Secretary of State for Wales. It was agreed that he would clear this passage in his speech with Mrs. Thatcher, Mr. Whitelaw and Mr. Pym.

The meeting closed at 6.12 pm.