

LEADER'S CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

Minutes of the 156th Meeting held at 5.30 p.m. on Wednesday, 23rd March 1977, in the Leader's Room at the House of Commons.

Present: Mrs. Thatcher (in the Chair)

Mr. Whitelaw, Lord Carrington,
Lord Hailsham, Sir Geoffrey Howe,
Mr. Pym, Sir Ian Gilmour,
Mr. Peyton, Mr. Jenkin, Mr. Davies,
Mr. St. John Stevas, Mr. Heseltine,
Mr. Maude, Mr. Neave, Mr. Edwards,
Mrs. Oppenheim, Mr. King, Mr. Nott,
Mr. Taylor.

In attendance: Sir Michael Havers, Mr. Butler,
Mr. Stanley, Mr. Patten, Mr. Ridley,
Mr. Hooson, Mr. Nicholson.

Apologies: Mr. Prior, Lord Thorneycroft.

1. Future Business for the week 28th March-4th April

On Monday, 28th March, there would be the conclusion of the debate on the Statement on the Defence Estimates (Mr. Churchill, Mr. Davies). This would be followed by the Remaining Stages of the General Rate (Public Utilities) Bill (Mr. Durant) and of the Marriage (Scotland) Bill. This would be followed by a Motion on EEC Documents COM/76/660, S/102/77 and R/616/77 on Fishery Resources.

On Tuesday, 29th March, Mr. H. Cowans would seek leave to introduce his Transport Bill under the 10 Minute Rule. This would be followed by the Budget (Mrs. Thatcher). There would then be Opposed Private Business: the Second Reading of the St. Paul's Playing Fields (Trust) Bill or GLC (General Powers) and this would be followed by Proceedings on the Agricultural Holdings (Notices to Quit) and on the British Airways Board Bill.

On Wednesday, 30th March, Lord James Douglas-Hamilton would seek leave to introduce his Dunfermline College of Physical Education for Women (Change of Name) Bill under the 10 Minute Rule. This would be followed by the second day of the Budget debate.

On Thursday, 31st March, there would be the third day of the Budget debate. This would be followed by a debate on the Ruling by the Chairman of Ways and Means of February 10th (Mr. Pym).

On Friday, 1st April, there would be the Private Members' Motions of Mr. John Lee, Mr. Patrick Mayhew and Mr. Tony Newton.

On Monday, 4th April, there would be the conclusion of the debate on the Budget Statement.

2. Matters Arising on Business

There was a discussion and the following points were agreed:

(i) Sir Geoffrey Howe would speak in the Budget debate on 30th March. A decision on other speakers would be taken at a later stage.

(ii) It was noted that, with regard to the proposed debate on the ruling of the Chairman of Ways and Means on 31st March, Mr. Foot would indicate the Government's intention to refer the matter to the Procedure Committee, and that we were satisfied with this solution.

3. The Political Situation

There was a discussion on the political situation that had arisen as a result of the Liberals' vote agreeing with the Government at the end of the No Confidence debate later that evening. Mrs. Thatcher explained to the LCC the apparent terms of the Liberal-Labour "accommodation" as set out in Mr. Callaghan's and Mr. Steel's speeches. The following points were agreed:

(i) In general, our reaction should be one more of sorrow than of anger. We should say that the Liberals were betraying all their traditions and were simply enabling the present Labour Government to remain in power a little longer until what might be a slightly more favourable climate for an election at which Labour would be seeking a larger majority to impose more Socialism.

(ii) We should take a positive and constructive line and seek to divide Liberal voters from their leaders and MPs and attract them to our cause.

(iii) We should point out that the Liberals were apparently acquiescing in the Government's deplorable record over the last three years.

(iv) We should criticise Mr. Callaghan for "wheeling and dealing" rather than attack Mr. Steel.

(v) With regard to the Housing and Homeless Persons Bill, which the Government were now supporting, we should make our criticisms in the Standing Committee on the Bill. We should decide later how to vote on Third Reading, when we could evaluate the effect of our criticisms in Standing Committee and of the correspondence that the Government was likely to receive from local authorities.

(vi) We should ask the Liberals why, if they had an accommodation with the Labour Party, they were contesting Labour-held seats like Stechford and Grimsby.

3. Other business

Mr. Davies reported on his visit to Washington, and it was agreed that Members of the LCC would seek to acquaint members of the new Administration and American Journalists with Conservative Party policies.

The meeting closed at 6.15 p.m.