

LEADER'S CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

Minutes of the 107th Meeting held at 5.00 p.m.  
on Monday, 12th April 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 Hailsham  
Mr. Maudling, Sir Geoffrey Howe  
Mr. Prior, Mr. Pym, Mr. Gilmour  
Mr. Jenkin, Mr. Peyton  
Mr. Raison, Mr. Maude  
Mr. Buchanan-Smith, Mr. Edwards  
Mr. Neave, Mrs. Oppenheim  
Mr. Biffen, Lord Thorneycroft  
Mr. Atkins

In attendance:

Mr. Butler, Mr. Stanley  
Mr. Patten, Mr. Ridley  
Mr. Nicholson

Apologies:

Mr. St. John-Stevas, Mr. Heseltine

1. Proposed Business for the Week 26th - 30th April

On Monday, 26th April there would be the Second Reading of the Iron and Steel (Amendment) Bill followed by Proceedings on the Statute Law (Repeals) Bill (Mr. Awdry) and a Prayer on the Prevention of Terrorism (Supplemental Temporary Provisions) Order (Mr. Alison).

On Tuesday, 27th April Mr. Anthony Steen would seek leave to introduce his National Health Service (School Health Service) Bill under the 10 Minute Rule. This would be followed by the Second Reading of the Health Services Bill (Mr. Jenkin, Dr. Vaughan).

On Wednesday, 28th April Sir George Young would seek leave to introduce his Consumer Protection (Motor Vehicles) Bill under the 10 Minute Rule. This would be followed by the Second Reading of the Rent (Agriculture) Bill (Mr. Pym).

On Thursday, 29th April there would either be a Guillotine Motion (Aircraft and Shipbuilding, Dock Work, Education) followed by the Second Reading of the Industry (Amendment) Act Bill or the Second Reading of the Industry (Amendment) Act Bill and of the Parliamentary and Other Pensions and Salaries Bill.

On Friday, 30th April there would be Private Members' Bills: the Remaining Stages of Mr. Ray Carter's Congenital Disabilities (Civil Liability) Bill, followed by the Second Reading of Mr. L. Pavitt's Cigarette Sales (Gift Coupons) Bill and Mr. Carol Mather's Detonators Bill.

2. Matters Arising on Business

There was a discussion on various points, and it was agreed that:

- 1) Mr. Buchanan-Smith would enquire whether, in the light of feeling in Scotland on the Health Services Bill, a Scottish spokesman should intervene in the Second Reading debate.

...../ii) We should

ii) We should protest vigorously at having only three hours to debate a guillotine motion relating to three important Bills.

iii) We should be prepared to vote against the Second Reading of the Industry (Amendment) Act Bill on Thursday, 29th April but a decision would be taken at a later date.

3. Report of the Policy Group on Nationalised Industries and the Consumer

Mrs. Oppenheim introduced her paper LCC/76/108 proposing that a Nationalised Industry Consumers' and Taxpayers' Audit Board should be established to fulfil three functions. The central part of the body would review, monitor and report on all aspects of cost effectiveness and efficiency in each of the nationalised industries. A Nationalised Industries Consumer Protection and Competition Council, under the same roof as the central part of the new body, would replace all existing nationalised industries consumer protection councils and the National Consumer Council, would analyse consumer complaints and examine ways in which competition might be introduced (where this would be in the interest of the consumer). The third branch would be a Nationalised Industries Ombudsman who would deal with individual complaints referred through Members of Parliament. The Group believed that the cost of the whole body would be less than that of the existing bodies, most of which would be either absorbed, reduced in size or abolished.

There was a discussion and it was agreed that certain members of the LCC should have a further discussion of the proposals with the group; these might also be considered further in the light of the report from Mr. Nicholas Ridley's Policy Group on Nationalised Industries, which might itself suggest methods of introducing more competition into the nationalised industries sector.

The following points were also agreed:

i) We should have regard to the difficulty of persuading the public that the abolition of certain existing bodies and the setting up of new bodies would, in practice, reduce rather than increase bureaucracy.

ii) We should draw attention to a recent report from the Prices Commission which indicated that nationalised industry prices were rising faster because of lack of cost control rather than the reduction of subsidies and that the best approach was to restore financial discipline in the nationalised industry sector.

iii) In making any proposals for the control of nationalised industries by Government, Parliament, or consumer bodies we should have regard to the existing difficulties of recruiting experienced and able public figures to serve in the highest managerial posts of these industries; we should endeavour to reduce, rather than increase, those difficulties.

4. Other Business

a) Mr. Michael Foot

It was agreed that now that Mr. Foot would no longer be serving on the Standing Committee on the Dockwork Regulation Bill, we would not automatically find a pair for him but would indicate that it was up to the Government to nominate a substitute member.

b) The Hain Case

It was agreed that we would not comment in public on this matter for the time being, but would watch the situation and await the report of the Devlin Committee on Identification Procedures.

c) Evidence to NEDO

Sir Geoffrey Howe reported that NEDO was inviting evidence from certain Conservative members on the control of nationalised industry by Government, which would be given in reply to a structured questionnaire which he was to examine. This was to assist NEDO in producing a report which would be unpublished and remain confidential.

It was agreed that in principle it would be helpful if certain Conservative members participated. Sir Geoffrey Howe would discuss our approach with certain members and would ensure that the confidential basis on which we give evidence would be clearly set out on paper.

d) Trade Union Elections

There was a discussion following a report in the Daily Mail regarding our advice to Conservative Trade Unionists on voting in union elections. It was agreed that Mr. Prior should indicate that, contrary to the Daily Mail report, we would continue to advise Conservative trade unionists on voting. The way in which this was actually done needed to be reviewed; the information should be disseminated by Conservative trade unionists, not in official Central Office bulletins.

The meeting closed at 6.15 p.m.