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LEADER'S CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

52ND MEETING

5.00 p.m., Wednesday, 5th March 1975

in the Leader's Room at the House of Commons

AGENDA

1. Minutes of the 51st Meeting - attached.
2. Future business.
3. Public Funds for Political Parties -  
Correspondence between the Chief Whip  
and the Lord President, LCC/75/67  
attached.
4. Prices Bill - LCC/75/66 attached -  
Mrs. Oppenheim.
5. Any other business.

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LEADER'S CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

Minutes of the 52nd Meeting held at 5.00 p.m. on Wednesday, 5th March 1975, in the Leader's Room at the House of Commons

Present: Mrs. Thatcher (In the Chair)

Mr. Whitelaw (briefly in the Chair at the beginning of the meeting),  
 Sir Keith Joseph, Lord Hailsham,  
 Mr. Maudling, Sir Geoffrey Howe,  
 Mr. Gilmour, Lord Carrington, Mr. Prior,  
 Mr. Pym, Mr. Jenkin, 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. Patten, Mr. Ridley  
 (In attendance)

1. Business of the Week

Mrs. Thatcher outlined the proposed Business of the House for the week 10th-14th March, and Monday, 17th March.

On Monday, the House would complete the Remaining Stages of the Finance Bill (Sir Geoffrey Howe and team). There would be a strong two-line Whip.

On Tuesday, there would be a debate on the White Paper on the Referendum on United Kingdom Membership of the European Community (see item 2 below). This would be followed by consideration of the Criminal Procedure (Scotland) Bill (Lords) the Supply Powers Bill (Lords) and the Statute Law (Repeals) Bill (Lords).

The Prime Minister would be in Dublin on Tuesday. It was agreed that the Chief Whip should therefore try and get Tuesday's and Wednesday's business exchanged.

On Wednesday, there would be the Remaining Stages of the Prices Bill (Mrs. Oppenheim and Mr. Lamont) (see item 4 below) and of the Export Guarantees Amendment Bill (Mr. Higgins and Mr. Renton). These would be followed by Lords Amendments to the Social Security Benefits Bill (Mr. Clarke and Mr. Boscawen). There would be a two-line Whip. There would then be Motions on the Calf Subsidies (United Kingdom) (Variation) Scheme (Mr. Jopling) and EEC Document on the European Monetary Co-operation Fund.

On Thursday, there would be a debate on Supply (12th Allotted Day) until seven o'clock (see item 3 below). This would be followed by the Greater London Council (General Powers) Bill (Mr. Finsberg), and Motions on the Northern Ireland Orders on Appropriation, Selective Employment Premium and Community Relations (Mr. Neave to arrange).

Business on Friday would be devoted to Private Members' Motions.

/ On Monday,

On Monday, 17th March, the House would deal with the Consolidated Fund (No. 3) Bill.

2. White Paper on the Referendum

The Government were proposing to debate the White Paper on a Motion for the Adjournment. There was a short discussion. It was agreed that the Opposition should ask for an extra two hours and that there should be a three-line Whip from 11.30 p.m. for 12.00 midnight. The principal Opposition speakers would be Mrs. Thatcher and Mr. Peyton.

3. Supply Day

A discussion took place. It was agreed that the subject for Thursday, 13th March should be Small Businesses and the Self-Employed. The main Opposition speakers would be Mr. Heseltine and Mr. David Mitchell. There would be a three-line Whip.

Other subjects which were considered included the Bullock Report which the Government appeared to have shelved; a good local government subject before the metropolitan district elections in April; and agriculture in April or May.

4. Prices Bill (LCC/75/66)

Mrs. Oppenheim said that it was felt that the time had come to establish the principle that food subsidies should be phased out as quickly as possible. There was a strong feeling that we should vote on an amendment to reduce the total amount of Government expenditure for this purpose from £1,700 million to £1,000 million, setting 1st April 1977 as the final date.

There was a discussion. Commodity prices were beginning to fall and in general much of future increases would be due to higher wages. This was supposed to be what the social contract was about. The hardship point was covered by our pledge that benefits such as pensions, FIS and supplementary benefit, would keep pace with prices.

It was agreed that there should be a two-line Whip.

5. Norton Villiers Triumph

Mr. Heseltine said that we should vote against the Order granting financial assistance to Norton Villiers Triumph basing our argument on the way in which it had been handled by Mr. Benn. The money had been held back in order to force the management to sign the Meriden deal.

Although the Order was to provide up to just under £13 million of export credit, it was in effect going to be used to finance the sit-in at Meriden. It was estimated that it would eventually cost some £39 million of taxpayer's money, with the NEB taking shares in the company, without Parliament having the opportunity to discuss it again.

There was a discussion in which a strong plea was made against maverick votes. It was agreed that there should be a two-line Whip.

6. State Finance for Political Parties outside Parliament

Letters from the Lord President to the Chief Whip were circulated to the Committee (LCC/75/67).

This was the Government's second proposal, and the Chief Whip reminded the Committee of the composition of the proposed independent committee to examine the question of the allocation of public funds to political parties outside Parliament.

The general feeling of the meeting was against the principle of public funds being used for this purpose, although there were warnings about the state of the Party's finances. There was a strong belief that people would not contribute if they thought that the Party was receiving Government financial assistance. Against this, the view was expressed that political parties should not have to depend for funds either on trade unions or big business.

It was agreed to continue the discussion at the next meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 6.15 p.m.