

LEADER'S CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

Minutes of the 161st Meeting held at 5.00 p.m. on Wednesday, 4th May 1977, 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, Lord Thorncroft, Sir Geoffrey Howe, Mr. Prior, Mr. Pym, Sir Ian Gilmour, Mr. Jenkins, Mr. Peyton, Mr. Davies, Mr. Neave, Mr. Heseltine, Mr. St. John-Stevas, Mr. Maude, Mr. Edwards, Mr. Nott, Mrs. Oppenheim, Mr. King, Mr. Taylor.

Mr. Atkins.

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

1. Proposed Business for the Week 9th-16th May

On Monday, 9th May, there would be the first day of the Finance Bill Committee (Sir Geoffrey Howe and team).

On Tuesday, 10th May, Mr. J. Renton would seek leave to introduce his Rent Act 1974 (Amendment) Bill under the 10 Minute Rule. This would be followed by the second day of the Finance Bill (Sir Geoffrey Howe and team).

On Wednesday, Mr. A. Beith would seek leave to introduce his Fishery Limits (Emergency Provisions) Bill under the 10 Minute Rule. This would be followed by a ballot for Friday, 17th May and by a Supply day. There would then be a Motion on EEC Documents R/2021/76 and R/2614/76 on Beef and Veal Prices.

On Thursday, 12th May, there would be the third day of the Finance Bill Committee (Sir Geoffrey Howe and team). This would be followed by a Motion on the Social Security (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Northern Ireland) Order.

On Friday, 13th May, there would be the Private Members' Bills of Sir Bernard Braine, Mr. R. Eyre, Mrs. Jill Knight and Mr. B. George.

On Monday, 16th May, there would be the Private Members' Motions of Mr. M. Mates, Mr. F. Borden and Mr. C. Merrison. This would be followed by the Second Reading of the Post Office Bill.

2. Matters Arising on Business

There was a discussion of certain points and it was agreed:

(i) We would devote the supply day on 11th May to debating agriculture on a motion to reduce the salary of the Minister. There would be a 3-line whip.

(ii) Before deciding what line to take in speeches on the second reading of the Post Office Bill on 16th May and how to vote, we would look at the size of other nationalised industries' boards and examine the system the Bill proposed to provide for employee representation on the board of the Post Office.

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### 3. Forthcoming Events

It was agreed that the key-note speech of the weekend would be by Mr. Heseltine, commenting on the results of the local government elections and indicating the opportunities these gave us of pursuing Conservative policies in the cities.

### 4. House of Lords: Business

There was a discussion on the Acts of Parliament (Correction of Mistakes) Bill and it was agreed that, while we would co-operate with the Government in expediting measures to correct drafting mistakes in Bills, we were opposed to this Bill, would try to persuade the Government to drop it, and if they would not, would vote against it.

### 5. Northern Ireland

Mr. Neave reported on the extent of the general strike in the Province. There was a discussion, and it was noted that Mrs. Thatcher had assured the Prime Minister that we would support any measures he took to minimise the dislocation caused by the strike and condemn those promoting it. The following points were agreed:

(i) If the situation deteriorated there would have to be an early debate on the subject.

(ii) Sir Michael Havers would take the opportunity of his meeting with the Attorney General the following day to ask for the Attorney's view on whether the strike in its present form was illegal.

### 6. Future Policy Work

There was a further discussion on future policy work (see Minutes of 160th Meeting, para. 7(ii)) and it was noted that the Research Department was producing draft statements of what we might say in areas where "The Right Approach" had not fully developed our policy, that Mr. Maude and Mrs. Patten would discuss these drafts with Sir Keith Joseph, and they would then be submitted to the Shadow Cabinet. It was agreed that first priority would be given to this "gap filling" exercise, and that a decision might then be taken as to whether to publish anything further on policy.

### 7. Southern Africa

Mr. Davies reported that we had not opposed a recent Government order to extend Rhodesian sanctions to trade-marks and patents as this stemmed from the original Security Council resolution on sanctions. It was agreed that while we did not oppose Mr. Rowland's attending the forthcoming conference of African "liberation" movements in Mozambique we would tell him to make clear that Britain opposed the use of violence by the "liberation" movements, and we would examine reports of that conference.

8. Television and Radio

It was noted that, owing to a number of factors, the imbalance between the frequency of appearances of Conservative and Labour spokesmen on television and radio was increasing to our disadvantage. There was a discussion and it was agreed that:

(i) We would need to try to overcome the problem that arose when the BBC and other authorities gave us very short notice of requests for a Conservative spokesman, on the occasion of, for example, the publication of a White Paper (for which of course Ministers were fully prepared).

(ii) Members making tours in various parts of the country were urged to set aside an appropriate amount of time for television and radio interviews.

(iii) There was ample scope for the improvement of our image as a Party on television, and members were urged to take advantage of the opportunities at Central Office for professional training in handling the media.

9. Unfair Contract Terms Bill

Mrs. Oppenheim reported on an agreement she had reached with the Government regarding this Bill, under which Sections 29 and 30 of the Post Office Act had been repealed in Committee by the Opposition. The Opposition would agree on Report to withdraw these amendments on a conditional basis that the Post Office would produce a Code of Conduct governing their behaviour. It was agreed that Mrs. Oppenheim should inform the Government that if this method was not successful we would require to make a further appropriate amendment at a later date.

10. Other Business

It was noted that Mrs. Thatcher would inform members of a convenient date for taking group photographs of the Shadow Cabinet.

The meeting closed at 6.12 p.m.