

LEADER'S CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

Minutes of the 108th Meeting held at 5.00 p.m. on Wednesday, 20th 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, Mr. Maudling, Sir Geoffrey Howe, Mr. Prior, Mr. Pym, Mr. Gilmour, Mr. Jenkin, Mr. Peyton, Mr. St. John-Stevas, Mr. Heseltine, Mr. Raison (items 3 & 4), Mr. Maude, Mr. Buchanan-Smith, Mr. Edwards, Mr. Neave, Mrs. Oppenheim.

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

Apologies: Lord Hailsham.

1. Proposed Business for the Week 3rd-7th May

On Monday, 3rd May, there would be the Second Reading of the Finance Bill (Sir Geoffrey Howe, Mr. Howell).

On Tuesday, 4th May, Mr. Roger Stott would seek leave to introduce his Social Security (Amendment) Bill under the 10 Minute Rule. This would be followed by the Second Reading of the Rent (Agriculture) Bill (Mr. Pym, Mr. Rossi), the Remaining Stages of the Atomic Energy Authority (Special Constables) Bill (Mr. Siffen, Mr. Hannam) and the Remaining Stages of the Land Drainage (Amendment) Bill (Mr. Shepherd).

On Wednesday, 5th May, Mr. Michael Thomas would seek leave to introduce his Medical Practitioners (Restriction of Right to Prescribe) Bill under the 10 Minute Rule. This would be followed by progress on the Report Stage of the Agriculture (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill (Mr. Pym, Mr. Jopling).

On Thursday, 6th May, there would be a Supply Day on Defence. There would be an Adjournment Debate on the army (Mr. Onslow, Mr. Goodhart), followed by the Second Reading of the Sevenshells Bill.

On Friday, 7th May, there would be Private Members' Bills: the Remaining Stages of Mr. G. Roberts' Explosives (Age of Purchase &c) Bill and Mr. Rooker's Licensing (Amendment) Bill, and the Second Reading of Mr. Allam's and Mrs. Butler's Bills.

2. Matters Arising on Business

It was agreed that we should sustain our vote against the Budget by voting against the Second Reading of the Finance Bill on the broad issue that tax rates and Government spending were too high.

3. Weekend Speeches on the Economic Situation

There was a discussion. It was agreed that:

- i) Members should be invited to co-ordinate their speeches, statements to the press or, if appropriate, letters to their constituency chairmen, on the lines of the Research Department's Briefing Note for that weekend, which was circulated. Members should argue that incomes policy by itself was not enough to restore a long term balance in the economy. Nor was it enough for individuals to live within their means: the Government must do so. Resources needed to be shifted from the public sector in order to restore profitability and jobs to the private sector.
- ii) These speeches should be so worded as not to appear to threaten sterling or to show undue resentment against any agreement the Government might reach with the unions on pay restraint.
- iii) We should draw attention to the plight of middle management, young executives and skilled craftsmen, whose differentials had been and were being steadily eroded. We should point out that as the world economy recovered more people with skill and ability would be able to emigrate, and there was evidence that pressures to emigrate were building up.
- iv) We should seek to reiterate certain key figures, like the fact that the Government were borrowing £1 for every £5 they spent.
- v) We should seek at all times to react immediately to speeches and statements by Government Ministers by, for example, refuting them over the telephone to the Press Association and not waiting to make a full speech.

4. The Committee of Selection

Mr. Peyton indicated that the Labour majority on the Committee of Selection was likely later that evening to refuse to change the composition of Standing Committees to reflect the Government's loss of a majority on the floor of the House. It was agreed that our members on the Committee should vote against such a decision, and that if that decision were nevertheless carried, we would table an appropriate motion, the terms of which would be discussed with Mrs. Thatcher, Mr. Peyton, Mr. Atkins and our MPs on the Committee.

5. Subjects for the Speaker's Conference

Mrs. Thatcher reported that Mr. Callaghan had written to her to suggest that the Speaker's Conference on Electoral Law should be reconvened. He proposed that it should discuss the subjects remaining when the last Speaker's Conference lapsed, and asked for the comments of the Opposition Parties and whether they wished to add any further subjects. It was agreed that:

- i) We should insist that the operation of Rule 1 of Schedule 2 of the 1949 Representation of the People Act, which now resulted in England being under-represented in Parliament, should be considered.
- ii) We might also suggest that increasing the size of candidates' deposits and the question of students' registration should also be discussed.

The meeting closed at 3.15 p.m.