

LEADER'S CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

Minutes of the 164th Meeting held at 5.00 pm.
on Wednesday, 25th 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, Sir Geoffrey Howe,
Mr. Prior, Mr. Pym, Sir Ian Gilmour,
Mr. Jenkin, Mr. Peyton, Mr. Davies,
Mr. Neave, Mr. Heseltine,
Mr. St. John Stevas, Mr. Haude,
Mrs. Oppenheim, Mr. King, Mr. Taylor.

Mr. Atkins.

In attendance: Mr. Brittan, Mr. Stanley, Mr. Patten,
Mr. Ridley, Mr. Hooson, Mr. Nicholson.

Apologies: Lord Hailsham, Lord Thorneycroft,
Mr. Edwards, Mr. Nott, Sir Michael Havers.

1. Proposed Business for the Week 13th-17th June

On Monday, 13th June, there would be a Supply Day. This would be followed by a debate on the Second Report from the Select Committee on Overseas Development in Session 1975-77 and the Second Report in Session 1976-77 on Relations with Developing Countries, and the related Government Observations (Mr. Braine, Mr. Tapsell). This would be followed by a Motion on ZEC Document R/752/77 on the European Social Fund.

On Tuesday, 14th June, Mr. D. Canavan would seek leave to introduce his Appointment of Ambassadors and other Public Servants Bill under the 10 Minute Rule. This would be followed by the remaining stages of the Coal Industry Bill (Mr. King, Mr. Gray) and by the remaining stages of the Transport (Financial Provisions) Bill (Mr. Fowler).

On Wednesday, 15th June, Mr. G. Janner would seek leave to introduce his Foreign and Commonwealth Relations Bill under the 10 Minute Rule. This would be followed by the Second Reading of the New Towns Bill (Mr. Speed) and by progress on the remaining stages of the Price Commission Bill (Mrs. Oppenheim, Mr. Parkinson).

On Thursday, 16th June, there would be a Supply Day. This would be followed by a Motion on EEC Document R/1435/68 on Taxation Systems for Commercial Vehicles.

On Friday, 17th June, there would be Private Members' Motions.

2. Matters Arising on Business

There was a discussion and it was agreed that we should protest vigorously at any proposal to conclude the Remaining Stages of the Price Commission Bill on 15th June: we believed a second day would be necessary to consider the several amendments on which there had been tied votes in Standing Committee.

3. Subjects for Supply Day

There was a discussion and it was agreed that, provided no other subject appeared topical at the time, we would debate the pay of the Armed Forces in Northern Ireland. It was noted that the following subjects might be debated in the near future: Fishing Limits; Education (sixth form provision and other subjects); Industrial Strategy; and "Drax".

4. Liaison with Conservative Local Authorities

Mr. Heseltine reported on the measures he was taking to ensure that there was adequate liaison between the Shadow Cabinet and the Party at Westminster and the leaders and other members of Conservative controlled local authorities. There was a discussion and the following points were agreed:

(i) When a Conservative local authority appeared to be implementing policies which were contrary to our programme, such as extending the operation of direct labour departments, we would seek to dissuade them by discreet pressures behind the scenes and through the membership of local Conservative Associations.

(ii) We should support our Conservative local authorities vigorously when, in implementing our policies, they were criticised or brought into conflict with the central Government.

(iii) We should encourage our MPs to liaise closely with their Conservative County Councillors, and this subject would be mentioned at a meeting of the 1922 Committee.

(iv) Guidance to our MPs was necessary on the subject and a paper would be circulated by Mr. Heseltine after his meetings in the following week with our representatives of the County Councils.

5. Iraq

Mr. Davies reported on his recent visit to Iraq.

6. Speaker's Conference

Mrs. Thatcher reported that the Prime Minister had written to her suggesting that the Speaker's Conference should discuss the representation of Northern Ireland at Westminster, thus implying that any discussion of the under-representation of England was to be postponed. There was a discussion and it was agreed that we would accept this proposal with reluctance. Our reply would reiterate the point already made in our correspondence with the Prime Minister about the urgency of considering the under-representation of England and would seek to take credit for the Government's concession on the under-representation of Northern Ireland. A copy would be sent to Mr. Holyneaux.

7. Backbench Committees and Policy Making

It was agreed that our backbench committees should be given adequate opportunity to consider developments in our stated policy.

8. Devolution

Mr. Pym reported on a proposal from Mr. Foot for a Select Committee on devolution which appeared to pre-suppose legislation on lines similar to the Scotland and Wales Bill. There was a discussion and the following points were agreed:

(i) We could not accept Mr. Foot's proposal.

(ii) Mr. Pym would seek an early opportunity of putting forward a counter proposal for a Select Committee to consider all proposals made for the improvement of the Government of Scotland and Wales. This would be on the lines of a form of words which Mr. Pym had circulated.

(iii) This proposal did not commit us to accept the principle of legislative devolution: it would be open for the Select Committee to decide that the only practicable solution was further administrative devolution.

The meeting closed at 6.10 p.m.