

LEADER'S CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

Minutes of the 190th Meeting held at 6.00 pm on Wednesday, 15th February 1978, in the Leader's Room at the House of Commons.

Present: Mrs. Thatcher (in the Chair)

Mr. Whitelaw, Sir Keith Joseph, Lord Carrington, Lord Thorneycroft, Sir Geoffrey Howe, Mr. Prior, Mr. Pym, Sir Ian Cilmour, Mr. Davies, Mr. Jenkin, Mr. Peyton, Mr. Neave, Mr. Heseltine, Mr. St. John Stevas, Mr. Maude, Mr. Nott, Mrs. Oppenheim, Mr. King, Mr. Taylor.

Mr. Atkins.

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

Apologies: Lord Hailsham, Mr. Edwards.

1. Proposed Business for the Week 20th-27th February

On Monday, 20th February, there would be the Second Reading of the Employment Subsidies Bill (Mr. Hayhoe). This would be followed by the Second Reading of the Home Purchase Assistance and Corporation Guarantees Bill (Mr. Rossi).

On Tuesday, 21st February, Sir Bernard Braine would seek leave to introduce his Abortion (Amendment) Bill under the 10 Minute Rule. This would be followed by a Supply Day and by a Motion on the Seventh Report from the House of Commons (Services) Committee 1976/77 (Members' Secretaries and Research Assistants' Payment and facilities).

On Wednesday, 22nd February, Sir Brandon Rhys Williams would seek leave to introduce his Co-ownership of Flats Bill under the 10 Minute Rule. This would be followed by the Third Reading of the Scotland Bill.

On Thursday, 23rd February, there would be a Supply Day allotted to a debate on the EEC Six-Monthly Report. This would be followed by the Second Reading of the Commonwealth Corporation Bill (Lords) and of the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Bill (Lords), which are Consolidation Measures. This would be followed by EEC Document R/1123/76 on Employment Relationships in the Community (Mr. Hayhoe).

On Friday, 24th February, there would be the Private Members' Bills of Mr. Osborn, Mr. St. John Stevas and Mr. Ross.

On Monday, 27th February, there would be a Supply Day.

2. Subjects for the Supply Days

There was a discussion and it was agreed that we should debate Taxation on the Supply Day on 21st February on a motion drawing attention to the way in which high taxes were destroying jobs. Sir Geoffrey Howe and Mr. Rees would speak and there would be a 3 line whip. It was also provisionally agreed to debate Law and Order in the Metropolitan Areas on the Supply Day on 27th February. It was also agreed that it would be desirable to have a supply Day on Immigration some time after the Ilford North by-election.

3. Post Office Workers (Industrial Action) Bill

Mr. Prior reported that in certain respects the Bill went further than simply confirming the right of Post Office workers to strike. There was a discussion and it was agreed that we should try to talk out the debate on Second Reading. We should indicate that unless it was amended in Committee to bring its provisions into line with those set out in Mr. Tom Jackson's original letter on the subject we should vote against it on Third Reading. It was also agreed that Mr. Prior would write to Conservative trade unionists explaining our attitude.

4. Rhodesia

Mr. Davies commented on the situation in the light of reports just received that Mr. Smith had reached agreement with Bishop Muzorewa and Mr. Sithole. It was agreed that, while we would need to study the details of any such settlement, and in particular assure ourselves that the people of Rhodesia as a whole were able to express their approval through a referendum or similar device, we would urge the Government to accept it, and urge the Patriotic Front to take part in the new interim government and suspend hostilities.

5. Immigration

Mrs. Thatcher said that members would be able to collect copies of the immigration paper from her office the following Monday morning in preparation for the meeting at 5.00 p.m.

6. Scotland

Mr. Taylor introduced the proposals in his paper, LCC(78)170. There was a discussion and the following points were agreed:

(i) We were not in a position to commit ourselves to the specific proposals made in the paper.

(ii) We needed to discuss regional policy as a matter of urgency so as to develop the line to be taken towards not only Scotland but also the other regions. It would be appropriate to consider dispersal of government offices under that heading. Sir Keith Joseph would arrange for a Policy Group to prepare a paper on the subject at an early date and it could then be considered by the full Shadow Cabinet.

(iii) We could say that we were prepared, other things being equal, if the Scotland Act had received Royal Assent by the time of a general election in which we were elected to government, and the referendum had not taken place, to hold the referendum. We

would, however, emphasise that any such referendum would be advisory and thus the references on page 5 of Mr. Taylor's paper to accepting "the decision of the Scottish people" and "letting the Scottish people decide" could not stand. Mr. Pym would agree a form of words with Mr. Taylor.

The meeting closed at 6.10 p.m.