

LEADER'S CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

Minutes of the 196th Meeting held at 5.00 p.m.
on Wednesday, 15th March 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 Gilmour,
Mr. Jenkin, Mr. Peyton, Mr. Davies,
Mr. Neave, Mr. St. John Stevas,
Mr. Maude, Mr. Nott, Mrs. Oppenheim,
Mr. Edwards, Mr. King, Mr. Taylor.

Mr. Atkins.

In attendance: Lord Denham, Sir Michael Havers,
Mr. Stanley, Mr. Patten,
Mr. Nicholson.

Apologies: Lord Hailsham, Mr. Heseltine.

1. Proposed Business for the Week 3rd-6th April

Mrs. Thatcher reported that the business for the week the House returned following the Easter Recess was, at the time of meeting, proposed as follows:

On Monday, 3rd April, there would be a debate on the RAF.

On Tuesday, 4th April and Wednesday, 5th April, there would be two days of the Committee Stage of the Wales Bill.

On Thursday, 6th April, there would either be a Supply Day or debates to provide more funds for British Steel or British Leyland.

(By the time of the Easter Recess it was known that on 6th April there would be the Second Readings of the Independent Broadcasting Authority Bill and the Cooperative Development Agency Bill.)

2. Matters Arising on Business

There was a brief discussion and it was agreed:

(i) We should vote twice on our amendments to the Public Expenditure White Paper the following evening.

(ii) If there was a Supply Day on the 6th April we should debate the Health Service.

3. Temporary Employment Subsidy

There was a discussion on the extent of this subsidy, the fact that 400,000 jobs were being temporarily subsidised by it and that it was being used particularly in and around the marginal seats. The following points were agreed:

(i) This was a delicate issue and our view was likely to be misrepresented by our opponents in the run-up to the election. In particular, comments made by union leaders on the speeches of Sir Keith Joseph, Mr. Lamont and Mr. Dykes in the debate on British Steel on 27th February showed what use might be made of our criticisms of the Government's policy. The whole matter required careful thought and Sir Keith Joseph and Mr. Prior would prepare a joint paper on TES and regional aid in general for discussion at an early meeting.

(ii) We should quote Mr. Healey reiterating, on a visit to Lancashire, that TES, as its name implied, was only a temporary subsidy.

(iii) Sir Keith Joseph would report to Mrs. Thatcher on his meeting with Mr. Edwardes the coming Friday.

(iv) We should back Mr. Edwardes' plans for British Leyland and should continue to do so as long as he held to them.

(v) We should increasingly put the emphasis on 1½ million unemployed and 400,000 people in artificially created jobs, as being the true measure of the depth of the recession under this Government.

4. Manifesto Preparations

Mrs. Thatcher reported that she had received papers from a number of Shadow spokesmen in response to her request for proposals for our Manifesto. It was noted that a certain number were still outstanding. There was a discussion and the following points were agreed:

(i) There would be an all-day meeting of the Shadow Cabinet in Central Office on 17th April at 10.30 a.m. to discuss these papers, after which it was proposed to start drafting the Manifesto.

(ii) The Research Department would prepare a covering document for the whole set of proposals indicating: a) the likely cost of each proposal; b) whether legislation was involved; c) whether the proposal had already been agreed in the light of our discussion on "The Right Approach" and "The Right Approach to the Economy".

(iii) The lists of proposed initiatives for the press conferences during the campaign would be sent to Mrs. Thatcher by Friday, 17th March.

5. Other Business

(a) Foreign Affairs

(i) Mr. Davies reported on the Rhodesian situation and it was agreed that this would be an appropriate subject for discussion in the adjournment debates at Easter.

(ii) If the Right were successful in the second round of the French elections it was agreed that we should congratulate them and make the most of their success in terms of British politics. It was noted that despite adverse opinion polls at the start of their respective election campaigns, both Australia and France had seen a considerable improvement in the position of the Right during those campaigns, but that it should be noted that in both cases the Right happened to be the governing party.

(b) The Weights and Measures Order

Mrs. Oppenheim reported that this would be debated shortly after the Recess, and seemed to ignore the concessions we secured from the Government in an earlier debate on the subject of metrication. It was agreed we should vote against the order on a 2-line whip with a reasoned amendment.

(c) The Electricity Bill

Mr. King reported on the state of play and there was a discussion. It was noted that this appeared to be too long a Bill to introduce so late in the Session and that it contained several controversial items. It was agreed that we could give no undertakings to the Government over this Bill.

6. Next Meeting

The next meeting would be on 5th April at 4.15 p.m. as there were divisions at 6.00 p.m.

The meeting closed at 6.00 p.m.