

LEADER'S CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

Minutes of the 225th Meeting held at 5.00 p.m. on Wednesday, 29th November 1978, 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 (for items 5 and 6), Mr. Prior, Sir Ian Gilmour, Mr. Pym, Mr. Peyton, Mr. Jenkin, Mr. Neave, Mr. Heseltine, Mr. St. John Stevas, Mr. Maude, Mr. Nott, Mr. King, Mr. Taylor, Mr. Carlisle, Mr. Biffen.

Mr. Atkins.

In attendance: Mr. Fowler, Mr. Percival, Lord Denham, Mr. Butler, Mr. Stanley, Mr. Patten, Mr. Wolfson, Mr. Nicholson, Miss Bulloch.

Apologies: Lord Hailsham, Lord Thorneycroft, Mr. Edwards, Mrs. Oppenheim.

1. Proposed Business for the Week 4th-11th December

On Monday, 4th December, there would be a Supply Day. This would be followed by a debate on a Motion to take note of the 1st-10th Reports from the Committee of Public Accounts in Session 1977-78, and the related Treasury Minute and Northern Ireland Memorandum (Mr. Lawson), and by Motions on the European Assembly Constituencies Orders for England and Wales and for Scotland (Mr. Howell, Mr. Younger).

On Tuesday, 5th December, there would be the Second Reading of the Education Bill (Mr. Carlisle, Dr. Boyson). There would be a Motion on the Social Security (Contributions Re-rating) Order and Opposition Prayer on the Social Security (Contributions)(Continuation) Order.

On Wednesday, 6th December, there would be the Remaining Stages of the Public Lending Right Bill (Mr. St. John Stevas). This would be followed by a Motion on the Northern Ireland (Various Emergency Provisions)(Continuation)(No.2) Order (Mr. Neave).

On Thursday, 7th December, there would be a Supply day with the subject to be decided. This would be followed by votes on Account and Winter Supplementaries.

On Friday, 8th December, there would be the Private Members' Motions of Mrs. Chalker, Mr. Rifkind and Mr. Sandelson.

On Monday, 11th December, there would be the Private Members' Motions of Mr. Peter Viggers, Mr. Austin Mitchell and Mr. Bryan Davies. These would be followed by a Motion on the Appropriation (No.4)(Northern Ireland) Order (Mr. Neave).

2. Matters Arising on Business

There was a discussion and it was agreed that we should not vote on the Second Reading of the Education Bill but should make speeches critical of certain aspects of the Bill, in particular Clause 6 on admission limits, and we would seek to amend the Bill in Committee.

It was noted that the Debate on Wallasey Peripheral Areas on 8th December was likely to be short and that most of the day would be taken up by Mr. Rifkind's Motion on policy towards economic sanctions against South Africa. It was agreed that Mr. Luce would speak in that debate.

It was also noted that Mr. Peter Viggers's Private Member's Motion on 11th December would be critical of the Government's handling of North Sea oil.

3. Subject for the Supply Day

It was agreed that we should debate pay sanctions and blacklisting on the Supply Day on 7th December. Mr. Prior would open and Sir Geoffrey Howe would close. There was a discussion about the form of the debate and the following points were agreed:

(i) In the absence of an agreement that the Government would not seek to amend the Opposition's Supply Motion, the vote at the end would be on the adjournment. There would be a 3 line whip.

(ii) Our speeches in the debate should be designed to unite the Party in opposition to sanctions which were unjust and arbitrary, and would penalise a profit-making and job-producing company which was also a successful exporter.

(iii) We should investigate the legality of the action the Government were proposing, in particular whether it would be in breach of existing contracts with Ford.

(iv) We should argue that the Government's action against Ford was intended to scare smaller companies on which sanctions could have serious effects.

(v) The Government might be asked whether it was proposing to buy its cars from Japan in the event of all motor companies in Britain settling outside the pay limit.

(vi) We should investigate the case of the electrical contractors' pay settlement which was badly mishandled by the Department of Employment.

4. Forthcoming Speeches

There was a discussion and the following was agreed:

(i) Sir Ian Gilmour would point out in a week-end speech the divisions in the Government and the Labour Party, and relate these to their split over Ford sanctions.

(ii) It was noted that Mr. Maude was making a speech or a statement on the same lines so as to obtain maximum impact in the press.

(iii) Mr. Heseltine, who was also speaking, would attack the Government for the increased mortgage rate and would also refer to the Conservative Party's contribution to bringing about the

proposed sale of Harrier jets to China. He would point out the importance of this order to the aircraft industry in general and to certain marginal seats in particular.

5. Other Business

(a) Financing of the BBC. Mr. Whitelaw reported on the position relating to the proposed increase in television licence fees and the reaction of the BBC. There was a discussion and the following points were agreed:

(i) We should not emphasise our views on the subject at present.

(ii) We should discuss the whole question in the near future and Mr. Whitelaw was invited to produce a paper.

(b) Prayer on the Social Security (Non-Contributory Invalidity Pension) Amendment Regulations. Mr. Jenkin reported that the Government were proposing to refer this issue to the National Insurance Advisory Committee and had promised not to take benefit away from any housewife pending the Committee's decision. It was agreed that we would wish to debate and vote on this issue when the Advisory Committee reported and should attack the Government in the meantime for having avoided the debate originally planned for 27th November.

(c) S.O.9 on the "Times" Closure. It was reported that the Speaker had granted an S.O.9 debate on the closure of Times Newspapers Ltd. It was agreed that Mr. Prior would speak in this debate.

(d) Liberal Supply Days. Mr. Atkins reported that we had received a letter from the Liberal Party requesting time for debates initiated by their Party in Supply time. It was noted that we had denied the Liberals such time in the previous session because we regarded them as one of the Government parties. It was agreed that we should now return to the former practice and would give the Liberals an opportunity for tabling a debate in Supply time before the end of the Session.

(e) Lord Carrington reported on his conversation with Mr. Gromyko in Moscow.

6. Future business

It was agreed that we should discuss Mr. Edwards's report on the referendum and the paper on the reform of the House of Lords at a later date.

The meeting closed at 6.10 p.m.