

7 April
CONFIDENTIAL

COPY NO. 1..

LEADER'S CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

105TH MEETING

REVISED AGENDA

Devolution will not now be taken at the meeting on Wednesday, 31st March. It will, however, be discussed at the LCC meeting next week on Wednesday, 7th April.

CHRISTOPHER PATTEN

Conservative Research Department
24 Old Queen Street, London SW1

CFP/GSE
30.3.76

7 April

CONFIDENTIAL

COPY NO. ...

LEADER'S CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

106TH MEETING

5.00 p.m., Wednesday, 7th April 1976, in the

Leader's Room at the House of Commons

AGENDA

1. Minutes of the 105th Meeting
2. Future Business
3. Forthcoming Events
4. Devolution - A Paper of Options open to the
Conservative Party, by Mr. Whitelaw
(LCC/76/107) - previously circulated
5. Any Other Business

Conservative Research Department
24 Old Queen Street, London SW1

CFP/GSB
1.4.76

LEADER'S CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

Minutes of the 105th Meeting held at 5.00 p.m.
On Wednesday, 7th 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, Lord Hailsham
Mr. Maudling, Sir Geoffrey Howe
Mr. Prior, Mr. Pym, Mr. Gilmour
Mr. Jenkin, Mr. St. John-Stevans
Mr. Heseltine, Mr. Maude
Mr. Buchanan-Smith, Mr. Edwards
Mr. Neave, Mrs. Oppenheim
Mr. Biffen, Lord Thorneycroft
Mr. Atkins
In attendance: Mr. Speed (item 2), Mr. Stanley
Mr. Patten, Mr. Ridley
Mr. Nicholson, Mr. Wynn

Apologies: Mr. Peyton, Mr. Raison

1. Proposed Business for 12th - 14th April

On Monday, 12th April there would be the Conclusion of the Budget Debate. This would be followed by a Debate on EEC Documents R/451/75 and R/452/76 on Proteins (Mr. Pym, Mr. Scott-Hopkins) and by the Lords Amendments to the Rating (Caravan Sites) Bill.

On Tuesday, 13th April Mr. D. Skinner would seek leave to introduce his House of Lords (Abolition) Bill under the 10 Minute Rule. This would be followed by a Supply Day, on which a Debate on the 11th Report from the Expenditure Committee, Session 1974-75 on The Children and Young Persons Act 1969 (HC 534) and any Special Reports thereon would take place.

On Wednesday, 14th April Mr. Cryer would seek leave to introduce his Health and Safety at Work (Amendment) Bill under the 10 Minute Rule. This would be followed by the Easter Adjournment Debate and the House would then rise for the Easter Recess.

2. Matters Arising on Business
a) Local Government Elections

Mr. Speed reported on preparations for the local government elections. There was a discussion and it was agreed that:

i) We should seek to have a Supply Day before the local elections, on one of the three subjects of local government interest on which we were well prepared, viz.: housing stock, sale of council houses or municipal trading. It was noted, however, that the Government was likely to try to avoid letting us have a Supply Day before these elections.

ii) We should ensure that the terms of reference for any such debate related only to England and Wales and not to Scotland, so as to avoid giving the SNP an opportunity to intervene.

iii) It was important to brief the candidates who were likely to be the leaders and committee chairmen on those councils where we expected to gain control, so as to ensure that they were prepared from the outset both to take initiatives and implement Conservative policies.

b) Mr. Stonehouse

Mrs. Thatcher reported that the death of Mr. O'Malley and the decision of Mr. Stonehouse to resign the Labour whip meant that the Government was now in a minority. In accordance with the rules of the House, we were now pressing for an Opposition majority of one on all Standing Committees which were set up on future Bills. There was a discussion and it was agreed that:

i) We should seek to discover whether, in the circumstances that had now arisen, the belief that the composition of existing Standing Committees could not be changed was valid and, if so, what the authority for this was.

ii) No member of our Front Bench would intervene during the debate on Friday, 9th April on Mr. Stonehouse's motion on the Condition of England. While we would not actively seek to dissuade our backbenchers from speaking in that debate, it was desirable to press on to the next motion, in the name of Mr. Durant, on getting value for money in local government.

c) Reacting to the Budget

There was a discussion of various aspects of the Budget, in particular the question of how we would react to the Government's promises of tax concessions conditional on the agreement of the TUC to a certain pay limit. It was agreed that:

i) We should vote against the first Budget resolution on Monday, 12th April on a three line whip.

ii) While we should put the constitutional arguments against the Government's proposed deal, we should recognise that the move was likely to obtain extensive public support. If the TUC agreed to what the Government required it would be difficult to oppose either the new pay limit or the tax cuts.

iii) We should warn that one of the problems of bargaining with the TUC over pay restraint was that in return the Government was likely to be pressed to agree to further undesirable legislation and other measures which would harm the economy.

3. Devolution

Mr. Whitelaw introduced his paper (LOC/76/107 - Devolution, A Paper of Options open to the Conservative Party). We needed to determine our line for the Scottish Party conference on 14th-15th May. With regard to any details beyond our commitment to a directly elected Assembly, it was best to keep

our options open so far as possible and await publication of the Government's legislative proposals. We expected one Bill, rather than two, probably by June.

There was a discussion and Mr. Whitelaw's general approach was agreed, as were the following points:

i) We could not renege on our commitment to a Scottish Assembly, and this should broadly follow the lines proposed in the Douglas-Home Report.

ii) We should emphasise the need to ensure that, if and when a directly elected Scottish Assembly was set up, the Conservative and Unionist viewpoint in it was amply and effectively represented.

iii) Mr. Whitelaw would seek to discuss the likely Government programme with Ministers.

iv) We should seek to persuade our English MPs that, if we were to be credible as the Party of the Union and as a "national" Party, their duty was to respect the wishes of the majority of the Scottish Conservative Party with regard to Scottish affairs.

v) Mrs. Thatcher, Mr. Whitelaw and Mr. Buchanan-Smith would discuss the line to be taken in speeches to the Scottish Party Conference, and would bring their conclusions to a meeting of the LCC after Easter.

The meeting closed at 6.20 p.m.