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LEADER'S CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

Minutes of the 100th Meeting held at 5.00 p.m. on Wednesday, 25th February 1976, in the Leader's Room at the House of Commons.

- Present: Mrs Thatcher (in the Chair)
 Mr Whitelaw, Sir Keith Joseph,
 Lord Hailsham, Sir Geoffrey Howe,
 Mr Prior, Mr Pym, Mr Gilmour,
 Mr Jenkin, Mr Payton,
 Mr St. John-Stevas, Mr Heseltine,
 Mr Raison, Mr Maude,
 Mr Buchanan-Smith, Mr Edwards,
 Mr Neave, Mrs Oppenheim,
 Mr Biffen, Lord Thornercroft
 Mr Atkins
- In attendance: Mr Onslow, Mr Finsberg (item 2, iii)
 Mr Stanley, Mr Patten
 Mr Ridley, Mr Nicholson
- Apologies: Lord Carrington, Mr Maudling

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1. Proposed business for the week 1st-8th March

On Monday 1st March there would be the Second Reading of the Road Traffic (Seat Belts) Bill (Mr Fowler, Mr Fry) followed by a Motion on the Housing Corporation Advances (Increase of Limit) Order (Mr Rossi).

On Tuesday 2nd March Mr Ian Gow would seek leave to introduce his Transport (Amendment) Bill under the 10 Minute Rule. This would be followed by the Second Reading of the Fatal Accidents and Sudden Deaths Inquiry (Scotland) Bill (Mr Rifkind, Mr Gray). There would also be the remaining stages of the Freshwater and Salmon Fisheries (Scotland) Bill (Mr Monro, Sir John Gilmour) and of the Crofting Reform (Scotland) Bill (Mr Buchanan-Smith, Mr Gray).

On Wednesday, 3rd March, Mr Greville Janner would seek leave to introduce his Sex Discrimination (Age of Retirement) Bill under the 10 Minute Rule. This would be followed by the Second Reading of the Race Relations Bill (Mr Whitelaw, Mr Alison) and a Motion on the EEC Commission Documents R/3113/73 and R/1150/75 on Lead Pollution.

On Thursday 4th March, there would be the Second Reading of the Rating (Caravan Sites) Bill (Mr Morris). At 7.00 p.m. there would be Opposed Private Business followed by the GLC General Powers Bill (Mr Finsberg).

On Friday 5th March, there would be the Second Readings of Private Members' Bill, the Bills being those of Mr Horem, Mr Mather, Mr Radice and Mr Golding.

On Monday 8th March, there would be a debate on the White Paper on Public Expenditure to 1979-80 (Cmd 6393)

2. Matters Arising on Business

There was a discussion on various matters arising from the proposed business, and it was agreed that:

- (i) Mr Ian Gow would be asked for a note regarding the contents of his Transport (Amendment) Bill, and Mr Atkins would in future seek to obtain information from Conservative Members about any Bills they wished to introduce under the 10 Minute Rule.
- (ii) In view of criticism that certain Members of the Shadow Cabinet had not voted for a Bill on the Post Office which Mr Gow had previously sought to have introduced under the 10 Minute Rule, we should seek to make it clear that the Shadow Cabinet did not normally take a view on 10 Minute Rule Bills. There might be exceptions to this, but these should be agreed on their merits by the Committee at the appropriate time.
- (iii) As there was no three-line whip on any other issue during the week, it was not desirable to have one for the relatively controversial GLC General Powers Bill on 4th March which, however, arose as Private Business. This decision not to whip on private Bills was in accordance with the decision taken at the previous meeting (para. 3(iv) LCC(76)96 Mtg). We should however vote to delete section 6 from the Bill and a major unofficial effort would be made to obtain maximum support for this vote. As many Members of the Shadow Cabinet as possible should vote: those with pressing engagements should consult with Mr Atkins and see whether it might be possible, where appropriate, to get a Conservative Peer to replace them.

3. Second Reading of the Race Relations Bill

Mr Whiteley explained the line he would take on the Second Reading of this Bill. It was agreed that:

- (i) We should not, as a Party, vote on the Second Reading of this Bill.
- (ii) We should indicate that much of the Bill was a codification of existing law, and that the principle of race relation legislation had by now been largely accepted. While legislation had a part to play in improving race relations, by itself it was not sufficient: for example, there should be strict control over the numbers of new immigrants allowed in. There were certain objectionable features in the Bill which we should criticise (such as, the provisions on private clubs and over incitement) and seek to amend during the Committee Stage of the Bill.

4. Debate on the White Paper on Public Expenditure

There was a discussion. It was agreed that:

- (i) While we should press at Business Questions the following day for the Government to give a second day out of their own time to debate the White Paper, we should be prepared to give one of our own supply days, as it was understood that the Government would not give way.
- (ii) We should not seek to get the Tribune Group to vote with us on the White Paper, but we should consider at a later meeting the tactics that should be followed and the motion that should be tabled.

5. Reacting to the White Paper on Public Expenditure

Sir Geoffrey Howe introduced the paper (LCC/76/101). There was a discussion. It was agreed that the following points should be emphasised:

- (a) The "cuts", in the key year 1978-79, were less than the cost of repaying the vastly increased amount of interest on Government debts.
- (b) Even the most optimistic growth rates in the White Paper seemed unrealistic compared with the pattern of growth in recent years.
- (c) We should answer the Government's arguments that public spending was good for the economy and private spending was bad or wasteful, and we should stress that a "Government grant" was really a taxpayers' grant.
- (d) We should constantly endeavour to express our reaction in terms that ordinary people could understand, and should constantly reiterate certain key figures, such as those on page 2 of the paper on the increase in debt interest since the last White Paper, and those showing the increase of debt interest over the last two years per head of population, as given in a Written Answer (Hansard, 19th February 1976, col. 784)
- (e) Our backbenchers should table questions to seek to discover the amount of natural wastage expected in various Government departments.

6. Cost of Defence

Mr Gilmour introduced his paper (LCC/76/100). There was a discussion. The paper was agreed subject to the last sentence on page 4 being amended to read: "We should confirm that, when we return to office, we will strengthen our defences where necessary: in consultation with our allies".

7. Other business

It was agreed that it was desirable for us to be able to indicate what positive incentives we would give to encouraging investment in profitable industry, apart from releasing resources by cutting public spending. Sir Geoffrey Howe and Mr Heseltine would continue their discussions on this subject.

The meeting closed at 5.15 p.m.