

LEADER'S CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

Minutes of the 132nd Meeting held at 11.00 a.m.
on Tuesday, 28th September 1976, in Central Office.

Present: Mrs. Thatcher (In the Chair)

Mr. Whitelaw, Sir Keith Joseph,
Lord Carrington, Mr. Maudling,
Sir Geoffrey Howe, Mr. Pym,
Mr. Gilmour, Mr. Jenkin, Mr. Peyton,
Mr. Maude, Mr. Buchanan-Smith,
Mr. Edwards, Mrs. Oppenheim,
Lord Thorneycroft.

Mr. Atkins.

In attendance: Mr. Butler, Mr. Stanley, Mr. Patten,
Mr. Ridley, Mr. Nicholson.

Apologies: Lord Halsnam, Mr. Prior, Mr. Biffen,
Mr. St. John-Stevas, Mr. Raison,
Mr. Heseltine, Mr. Neave.

1. The State of the Economy

Mrs. Thatcher drew attention to the recent fall in the value of the £, and it was noted that the Government might make a statement in the House of Lords that afternoon. There was a discussion on what reaction we might make, and it was agreed that a statement could only be drafted after there had been time to study Mr. Callaghan's speech at the Labour Party Conference that morning.

2. Reports During the Recess

There was a discussion of the various criticisms made of the Party's performance by Conservative MPs and others in recent weeks. The following points were agreed:

(i) We should seek to encourage political correspondents to give more attention to the Conservative analysis of the country's present problems, and our proposed solutions, rather than to report criticisms of individual Party spokesmen from unrepresentative quarters.

(ii) We should ensure that Monthly News effectively put across the Conservative case and explained what our MPs and supporters were doing to further it.

(iii) Lord Thorneycroft should refer in his address to the Party Conference to the large numbers of speeches made in recent weeks all over the country by members of the Shadow Cabinet which had largely gone un-reported.

(iv) In addition to communicating our alternative policy at the Party Conference, we should draw as much attention as possible to the divided state of the Labour Party.

3. Arrangements for Launching the Strategy Document

There was a discussion of the arrangements for launching the strategy document and for communicating it to the Press and other interested parties. It was noted that Mrs. Thatcher was meeting some editors of leading newspapers.

It was agreed that:

(i) The approach in the document should be explained, before publication, to representatives of the Monday Club, the Bow Group, the Selsdon Group and the Tory Reform Group.

(ii) Lord Thorneycroft should talk to the respective Chairmen of the FCS and the Young Conservatives.

(iii) Sir Geoffrey Howe would see Mr. John Methven, the Director General of the CBI, and we should seek to obtain a public indication of general support for our strategy document from that organisation.

(iv) Personal copies of the document should be sent to Mr. Len Murray and Mr. Cyril Plant, the General Secretary and President of the TUC respectively.

(v) Mr. Buchanan-Smith would get in touch with Mr. Johnson-Smith to arrange for certain Scottish newspapers outside Edinburgh to obtain copies of the document in time to comment.

(vi) Members of the Shadow Cabinet should, where possible, accept all invitations to comment on the document on television and radio.

4. The Party Conference

It was noted that the two balloted motions were on Northern Ireland, on which Mr. Neave would speak, and the organisation and political education of Conservative trade unionists. Mr. Edwards was invited to reply to the latter resolution.

With regard to the discussion on "People, Parliament and the Constitution", to which Lord Carrington was to reply, it was agreed that he should discuss, if necessary, questions like electoral change, a referendum on devolution, and direct elections to the European Parliament, with Mrs. Thatcher, Mr. Whitelaw and Sir Keith Joseph. It was further agreed that while we should not rule out a referendum on devolution, we should draw attention to problems relating to wording of the question, the timing and parts of the United Kingdom which would vote.

5. The Speaker's Conference

Mrs. Thatcher reported that Mr. Callaghan had replied to her letter requesting inclusion of the under-representation of England on the agenda of the Speaker's Conference (see Minutes of 130th Meeting, paragraph 1). Mr. Callaghan had indicated his unwillingness to do this although he suggested that it might be considered later. It was agreed that we should press the Prime Minister further to include the subject on the Agenda.

Mrs. Thatcher also reported on a letter from Mr. Steel asking whether we would press to have Electoral Change included on the Agenda for the Speaker's Conference. She had replied that, while we had given an undertaking that if the Government wished to include this subject we would not object, the Government had at no stage suggested this, and we were not inclined to press for it now.

especially as Mr. Jeremy Thorpe, when Leader of the Liberal Party, had indicated that a Speaker's Conference was not a satisfactory way of examining the issue.

The meeting closed at 12.05 p.m.