

LEADER'S STEERING COMMITTEE

Minutes of the 38th Meeting held at 5.00 p.m.
on Monday, 23rd February 1976, in the
Leader's Room at the House of Commons

Present: Mrs. Thatcher (in the Chair)

Mr. Whitelaw, Sir Keith Joseph
Mr. Maudling, Sir Geoffrey Howe
Mr. Pym, Mr. Gilmour
Lord Thorneycroft

Mr. Atkins

In attendance: Mr. Butler, Mr. Stanley
Mr. Baker (item 2)
Mr. D. Howell (item 2)
Mr. Patten, Mr. Ridley
Mr. Nicholson

Apologies: Lord Carrington, Mr. Prior
Mr. Maude

1. Debate on East-West Relations

Mr. Maudling and Mr. Gilmour introduced a discussion about the Front Bench line in the debate on East-West relations the following day. It was agreed that:

i) While we should remain critical of previous cuts in defence spending, we should not pledge ourselves to restore them all.

ii) While détente was obviously desirable as a broad objective and as an alternative to deteriorating relations with the Communist countries, we should be critical of the Soviet Union's non-implementation of the Helsinki agreement and growing signs of Soviet imperialism around the world.

iii) In view of the sharply divided views in the Party and the country over whether help should be provided to South Africa or Rhodesia (under Mr. Smith's Government) if they were attacked, we should avoid at the moment any commitment one way or the other on the questions of military support or arms supplies. The main aims were to obtain a just and workable settlement between the representatives of the Europeans and the Africans in Rhodesia, and to get the Cuban troops out of Angola; we should press Mr. Callaghan to exert all his efforts in these directions. It was virtually impossible for Britain to intervene militarily in southern Africa, partly because of our commitments in Northern Ireland, Germany and elsewhere, and it would be undesirable to take any action that would alienate the majority of black African states from the West and drive them towards an alliance with the Communists.

2. Public Service Pay and Pensions

Mr. Baker introduced the Policy Group on Public Service Pay and Pensions Report (LSC (76) 40). There was a discussion.

It was agreed that:

- i) The subject should be further discussed at a later date by the Shadow Cabinet.
- ii) We should seek to press the Government to reveal more relevant facts about the situation, either through the Select Committee on Expenditure, or, perhaps, through a half Supply Day debate.

The meeting closed at 6.05 p.m.