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LEADER'S CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

233RD MEETING

5.00 p.m., Wednesday, 14th February 1979, in the
Leader's Room at the House of Commons.

AGENDA

1. Future Business.
2. Forthcoming Events.
3. The Current Situation.
4. Leasehold Reform.
5. Any other Business.

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CFP/ASD
12.2.79

LEADER'S CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

Minutes of the 233rd Meeting held at 5.00 p.m.
on Wednesday, 14th February 1979, in the Leader's
Room at the House of Commons.

Present: Mrs. Thatcher (in the Chair)

Mr. Whitelaw, Sir Keith Joseph,
Lord Hailsham, Lord Thorneycroft,
Sir Geoffrey Howe, Mr. Prior,
Mr. Pym, Sir Ian Gilmour,
Mr. Jenkin, Mr. Peyton, Mr. Neave,
Mr. Heseltine, Mr. St. John Stevas,
Mr. Nott, Mrs. Oppenheim, Mr. King,
Mr. Taylor, Mr. Carlisle,
Mr. Biffen.

In attendance: Sir Michael Havers, Mr. Fowler,
Lord Strathcona, Lord Denham,
Mr. Rossi, Mr. Stanley, Mr. Wolfson,
Mr. Patten, Mr. Ridley, Mr. Nicholson.

Apologies: Lord Carrington, Mr. Maude, Mr. Edwards.

1. Mr. Reginald Maudling

It was agreed that a message of condolence would be sent on
behalf of the whole Shadow Cabinet to Mrs. Maudling.

2. Proposed Business for the Week 19th-26th February

On Monday, 19th February, there would be a Supply Day: the
First Report from the Select Committee on Procedure Session
1977-78. The 1st to 8th Reports from the Sessional Procedure
Committee, 1976-77, would also be relevant (Mr. St. John Stevas).

On Tuesday, 20th February, Mrs. Bain would seek leave to
introduce her Protection of Otters (Scotland) Bill under the
10 Minute Rule. This would be followed by the conclusion of
the debate on Procedure.

On Wednesday, 21st February, Mr. Ashley would seek leave
to introduce his Coal Mining (Subsidence) Bill under the 10
Minute Rule. This would be followed by Motions on the Northern
Ireland Orders on Rates Amendment (Mr. Neave, Mr. Goodhart) and
on Judgements Enforcement, and by certain Consolidation Measures.
There would then be a debate on a Motion on EEC Documents on the
Communities' Budget (Mr. Lawson).

On Thursday, 22nd February, there would be a debate on the
White Paper "The Review of the Mental Health Act 1959",
Cmd. 7320.

On Friday, 23rd February, there would be the Private Members'
Bills of Mr. Trotter, Mr. White, Mr. Pavitt and Mr. Hooley, and
other measures. The House would then rise until Monday, 5th March,
for a recess related to the referendums on Devolution.

3. Debate on Procedure (19th-20th February)

There was a discussion on the recommendations of the First Report from the Select Committee on Procedure, and it was agreed that Mr. St. John Stevas, who would speak in the debate, would take the following line:

(i) He would reiterate the points previously made by Mr. Pym, who had said that in the first Session of a Conservative Government we would arrange for the House of Commons to express its view on various proposals in the Report, but would indicate that we were not committed at that time to the details. After we had received the views of the House we would consider the proposals in detail and decide whether to recommend them or a variant to the House. Mr. Pym had spelt this out in this speech to the 1978 Party Conference and his speech at Cambridge in October 1978.

(ii) He would make favourable reference to the Report of the Renton Committee on the Preparation of Legislation and to their conclusion that the preliminary discussions before legislation was introduced were usually most unsatisfactory.

(iii) In referring to the proposals for a recasting of the Committee Structure, we would have regard to the value of certain Committees that it was proposed to merge or abolish, such as the Expenditure Committee.

(iv) We would consider the possibility of the Scottish Grand Committee sitting in Edinburgh High School if the result of the Referendum on Scottish Devolution was against the Government's proposals.

(v) Our general purpose was to give a high priority to restoring Parliamentary control of the executive and providing for a proper scrutiny of legislation.

4. Leasehold Reform

Mr. Rossi introduced his paper LCC/79/193. There was a discussion and it was agreed that, while we were aware that there were problems arising in central London as a result of the impact of Arab money on the property market, we could not undertake to support Mr. Freeson's proposed Bill.

5. Local Authority dispute

Mr. Heseltine reported on the likely outcome of this dispute, based on information he had received from the Research Department. There was a discussion and the following points were agreed:

(i) If the information about the terms of the settlement were correct, we should point out that this was probably the most disastrous settlement in the current pay round; it represented a concession to a large group which wielded no particular economic power, attracted little public sympathy and was composed of unskilled and semi-skilled people who had, in many cases behaved with scant regard for the anxiety and suffering they were causing.

(ii) If the proposed phasing of prospective increases in pay arising from a comparability study were agreed, we should endeavour to blame the Government for any extra increases in the rates. In the meantime, we should press for comparisons not only of pay, but of work, manning and productivity, emphasising that high pay must be balanced by economies in labour. We should indicate that the evidence from the current strikes had shown that there was plenty of scope for economies in labour.

6. Iran

Mr. Pym reported that various backbenchers had indicated their desire for an early debate. There was a discussion and it was agreed that, while a debate would eventually be necessary, we would, for the present, ask Dr. Owen and Mr. Mulley and other Ministers for statements on the prospects for the security of the Middle East, on oil supplies, on trade and defence contracts and on the likely effects on banking.

7. The Employment Opportunities (Small Businesses) Bill

It was agreed that it was important to vote in sufficient strength for the closure of the debate on the Second Reading of this Bill on Friday, 16th February, and members of the Shadow Cabinet who did not have pressing speaking engagements were urged to attend in the afternoon.

The meeting closed at 6.12 pm.