

LEADER'S CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

Minutes of the 187th Meeting held at 5.00 pm on Wednesday, 25th January 1978, 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, Sir Ian Gilmour, Mr. Jenkin, Mr. Peyton, Mr. Davies, Mr. Neave, Mr. Heseltine, Mr. St. John Stevas, Mr. Maude, Mr. Edwards, Mr. Nott, Mrs. Oppenheim, Mr. King, Mr. Taylor.

Mr. Atkins.

In attendance: Sir Michael Havers, Mr. David Howell, Mr. Douglas Hurd, Lord Belstead, Mr. Stanley, Mr. Butler, Mr. Patten, Mr. Ridley, Mr. Hooson, Mr. Nicholson.

Apologies: Lord Carrington, Mr. Pym.

1. Proposed Business for the Week 30th January-6th February

On Monday, 30th January, there would be a Supply Day. This would be followed by a Motion on EEC Documents COM(72)225, R/2113/73 and R/1966/77 on Excise Duty Harmonisation.

On Tuesday, 31st January, Mr. Ivor Stanbrook would seek leave to introduce his Age of Compulsory Retirement Bill under the 10 Minute Rule. This would be followed by the 13th day of the Committee Stage of the Scotland Bill (Mr. Pym and team).

On Wednesday, 1st February, there would be a 10 Minute Rule Bill. This would be followed by the 14th and final day of the Committee Stage of the Scotland Bill (Mr. Pym and team) and by a Prayer on Community Drivers' Hours Rules (Temporary Modifications) Regulations (Mr. Fowler).

On Thursday, 2nd February, there would be the 1st day of the Committee Stage of the European Assembly Elections Bill (Mr. Whitelaw and team).

On Friday, 3rd February, there would be the Second Readings of Private Members' Bills, the first being that of Mr. Bryan Davies.

On Monday, 6th February, there would be Private Members' Motions, the first being that of Rear Admiral Morgan Giles.

2. Matters Arising on Business

There was a discussion and the following was agreed:

(i) We would not vote on the Community Drivers' Hours Rules (Temporary Modifications) Regulations Prayer, but Mr. Fowler would point at the cost of these Regulations and seek to draw out the Government on certain points of detail.

(ii) A Motion on Soviet Activity in Africa would be suggested to Rear Admiral Morgan Giles for debate as a Private Member's Motion on 6th February.

(iii) We would press the Government to give a full day's debate on the Second Reading of the Inner Urban Areas Bill.

3. Subject for the Supply Day

There was a discussion and it was agreed to debate Unemployment in the United Kingdom on the Supply Day on 30th January. Mr. Prior would open and Mr. Taylor would close. We would condemn, in particular, the fact that unemployment in Scotland had passed the 200,000 mark.

4. Prospective Business

There was a discussion on certain controversial Private Members' Bills which were expected to be debated in the next few weeks. The following points were agreed:

(i) We would examine the Labour Private Member's Bill to give Post Office workers the right to strike to see if it made any significant changes in the law. If, as expected, it did not, we would not need to ensure a substantial vote against it.

(ii) It was desirable on the whole to avoid systematic unofficial whipping on such Bills as it caused problems as to which Bills we would treat in this way and which we would not, and also involved cancellation of Friday engagements which were of increasing importance in what was likely to be an election year.

(iii) We would not therefore mount such a campaign against Mr. Nikardo's Employment Protection Employment Bill on the coming Friday, 27th January, and while voting against it, we would permit Members to pair.

(iv) We would seek to vote in strength on the Second Reading of Mr. Townsend's Bill on Child Pornography, and we should attack the Government vigorously in the House, on television that weekend and in the press, if they put obstacles in its path.

5. The Guillotine on the European Assembly Elections Bill

There was a discussion and it was noted that the Government were not likely to concede our wish for the timetable to be extended to provide four days debate on this Bill. Nevertheless it was agreed that there would be a free vote for the Conservative Party. It was noted that while the substantial majority of the Shadow Cabinet would vote for the guillotine, individual members might vote against or abstain if they so wished.

6. The Political Situation

There was a discussion on the Party's present position. Members of the Shadow Cabinet who had important speeches to deliver were requested to give Central Office's Communications Department two or three days' notice so that the speech might be "sold" to the press. Members were also asked to suggest attractive items which we could reveal at our various press conferences during an election campaign. In particular, it was noted that the Government had given the impression that they had done a lot for the elderly, and we needed to counter this.

7. Other Business

There was a discussion on our attitude in the House of Lords to the Judicature (Northern Ireland) Bill. It was agreed that it was preferable for the Northern Ireland judges to be under the general administration of the Lord Chancellor's office rather than that of the Northern Ireland Office, and we would support an amendment to that effect.

The meeting closed at 6.10 p.m.