

LEADER'S CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

Minutes of the 155th Meeting held at 5.00 p.m. on Wednesday, 16th March 1977, in the Leader's Room at the House of Commons.

Present: Mrs. Thatcher (in the Chair)
 Mr. Whitelaw, Sir Geoffrey Howe,
 Mr. Prior, Mr. Pym, Sir Ian Gilmour,
 Mr. Jenkin, Mr. St. John Stevas,
 Mr. Heseltine, Mr. Maude, Mr. Neave,
 Mr. Edwards, Mrs. Oppenheim,
 Mr. King, Mr. Nott, Mr. Taylor,
 Lord Thorneycroft.

In attendance: Sir Michael Havers, Mr. Stanley,
 Mr. Patten, Mr. Ridley, Mr. Nicholson.

Apologies: Lord Hailsham, Mr. Peyton, Mr. Davies.

1. Future Business for the Week 21st-28th March

On Monday, 21st March, there would be the Second Reading of the Redundancy Rebates Bill (Mr. Hayhoe, Mr. Madal). This would be followed by the Second Reading of the Police (Scotland) Bill (Mr. Taylor, Mr. Younger) and by a Motion on EEC Document R/2639/76 on Coking Coal for the Steel Industry.

On Tuesday, 22nd March, Mr. I. Clemitson would seek leave to introduce his Auditing Reform Bill under the 10 Minute Rule. This would be followed by a Motion on the Defence White Paper and by a Motion on the Londonderry Port and Harbour Commissioner Acts (Amendment) Northern Ireland Order.

On Wednesday, 23rd March, Mr. B. Grocott would seek leave to introduce his Penal Reform Bill under the 10 Minute Rule. This would be followed by the second day of a Motion on the Defence White Paper and by a Motion on EEC Documents R/1668/76 and R/2578/76 on Animal Health.

On Thursday, 24th March, there would be a debate on the Chairman of Ways and Means Ruling of Thursday, 10th February. This would be followed by Motions on the European Communities (Definition of Treaties) Orders and by Opposed Private Business (Merseyside Bill).

On Friday, 25th March, there would be the following Private Members' Motions: Mr. P. Mills's Direct Elections to the European Parliament and those of Mr. Bryan Gould and Mr. A. Jones.

On Monday, 28th March, there would be the Lords Amendments to the Social Security (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill. These would be followed by a Motion on the Family Income Supplements (Computation) Regulations and by Opposed Private Business (St. Paul's Playing Fields Bill).

2. Matters Arising on Business

There was a discussion on various points and the following was agreed:

(i) With regard to the Government's failure to table a Motion to enable the House to approve, or even take note of the Public Expenditure White Paper, we should make maximum use of the fact that the Government was now incapable of obtaining the consent of the House for its own policies. We should consult our procedural experts to see if there was any device which might enable us to vote on the White Paper after the debate.

(ii) Mr. Atkins would seek to obtain a half Supply Day on the proposed gas price increases. If this was not possible, we should seek to take an emergency half Supply Day. If the Government gave us a whole Supply Day, we should debate gas in the first half and the proposed closure of certain Scottish teacher training colleges in the second half. On gas, our speakers would be Mrs. Oppenheim and Mr. Taylor. We should concentrate our attack on the Government's failure to observe its own Price Code, and in particular on Mr. Hattersley, and we should not seek to involve Mr. Benn in the debate.

(iii) We should not vote on the Second Reading of the Redundancy Rebates Bill.

(iv) There would be a 2 line whip on the Police (Scotland) Bill.

(v) Our speakers in the two-day defence debate would be Sir Ian Gilmour, Mr. Davies, Mr. Churchill and one of the vice-chairmen of the Defence Committee. There would be a 3 line whip at the close of the debate on 28th March.

(vi) We should object very strongly to the proposal to debate the ruling of the Chairman of Ways and Means on 24th March.

3. Other Business

(i) There was a short discussion on Parliamentary tactics. It was agreed that, while we should make no offer at present to the Northern Ireland MPs we should show our concern at the deteriorating state of security in Northern Ireland and underline the strength of our commitment to a Speaker's Conference to discuss the number of Northern Ireland MPs. We should await a suitable occasion for a Motion of No Confidence in the Government.

(ii) Mr. Whitelaw reported on the likely recommendations of the Annan Committee on broadcasting which was expected to report the following week. He explained his proposed reactions, viz. that to avoid a further increase in the television licence or in subsidies from the taxpayer, the proposed fourth television channel should be opened to bids from such private companies and interests as were interested. This was agreed.

The meeting closed at 6.15 p.m.