

LEADER'S STEERING COMMITTEE

Minutes of the 41st Meeting held at 5.00 p.m.  
on Monday, 29th March 1976, in the Leader's  
Room at the House of Commons.

Present: Mrs. Thatcher (in the Chair)  
Mr. Whitelaw, Sir Keith Joseph  
Lord Carrington, Mr. Maudling  
Sir Geoffrey Howe, Mr. Prior  
Mr. Pym, Mr. Gilmour  
Mr. Maude, Lord Thorneycroft  
Mr. Atkins

In attendance: Mr. Buchanan-Smith, Mr. Edwards  
Mr. Butler, Mr. Stanley  
Mr. Patten, Mr. Ridley  
Mr. Nicholson, Mr. Wynn

Apologies: Mr. Peyton

Devolution

Mr. Whitelaw introduced his paper LSC (76) 51 on the options over devolution open to the Conservative Party, pointing out that although we were continuing to press for separate Bills for Scotland and Wales, the Government was likely to produce only one Bill. We needed to decide our attitude to an Assembly and whether we were for or against the Government's proposals before the Scottish Party Conference. As long as we emphasised our continued commitment to a directly elected Scottish Assembly, the Scottish Party would, for the most part, probably be prepared to go along with our opposition to the Government's legislation.

There was a discussion and the following points were agreed:

- i) We should probably remain committed to a directly elected assembly for Scotland, on the lines proposed by the Douglas-Home report. This was likely to carry the support of a majority of the Conservative Party in Scotland and to be the least objectionable devolution proposal to the Party in England.
- ii) We needed to give attention to ensuring the election of a large number of Conservatives to any Assembly.
- iii) We also needed to examine further the detailed problems arising from the possible use of a referendum, especially with regard to the wording of the question(s), so as to avoid the possibility of an exaggerated vote for independence simply in order to guarantee the establishment of a powerful Assembly. We needed also to consider at what point and in what circumstances a referendum might be used.
- iv) Mr. Whitelaw would seek to obtain details from Dr. David Butler regarding opinion research, which the latter was reported to have carried out, showing extensive support for independence.\*\*
- v) Mr. Whitelaw's paper would be discussed by the Leader's Consultative Committee at its meeting on Wednesday, 7th April.

The meeting closed at 6.15 p.m.

\*\* (Mr. Maude reported to the L.C.C. of Monday, 12th April that in fact this was an impression Dr. Butler had formed after a visit to Glasgow and that no opinion poll had been taken).