

LEADER'S CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

Minutes of the 181st Meeting held at 5.00 p.m.  
on Wednesday, 30th November 1977, in the Leader's  
Room at the House of Commons.

Present: Mrs. Thatcher (in the Chair)

Mr. Whitelaw, Sir Keith Joseph,  
Lord Carrington, Lord Hailsham,  
Mr. Prior, Sir Ian Gilmour,  
Mr. Davies, Mr. Jenkin, Mr. Peyton,  
Mr. Neave, Mr. St. John Stevas,  
Mr. Maude, Mr. Edwards, Mr. Nott,  
Mrs. Oppenheim, Mr. King, Mr. Taylor.

Mr. Atkins.

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

Apologies: Lord Thorneycroft, Sir Geoffrey Howe,  
Mr. Pym, Mr. Heseltine.

1. Proposed Business for the Week 5th-12th December

On Monday, 5th December, there would be a Supply Day: a debate on a motion to take note of Reports from the Select Committee on Public Accounts in Session 1976-77, and the related Treasury and Northern Ireland Memoranda (Mr. Lawson). This would be followed by a Motion relating to the Sheriff (Removal from Office) Order.

On Tuesday, 6th December, there would be the 5th day of the Committee Stage of the Scotland Bill (Mr. Pym and team). This would be followed by an Amendment of Units of Measurement (Hydrocarbon Oil, etc.) Order.

On Wednesday, 7th December, there would be the 6th day of the Committee Stage of the Scotland Bill (Mr. Pym and team). This would be followed by EEC Energy Documents R/1955/77 and R/1959/77, R/2594/77, R/2347/77, R/2348/77 and a Motion on Nuclear Policy on EEC Documents R/1901/77 and R/1958/77.

On Thursday, 8th December, there would be Motions on Northern Ireland Orders on Emergency Provisions and Criminal Law (Mr. Neave, Mr. Biggs-Davison), on Appropriation, and on Rates, Agricultural Wages, Electricity Service, Supplementary Benefits and Road Races.

On Friday, 9th December, there would be the Private Members' Motion of Mr. Page on Pay and Condition of the Armed Forces, and possibly those of Mr. Steen and Mr. Bottomley.

On Monday, 12th December, there would be a Supply Day. This would be followed by Votes on Account, etc. and by the European Communities (Definition of Treaties (No.6)) Order.

2. Matters Arising on Business

Certain points were discussed and it was agreed that:

(i) Mr. Taylor would speak in the debate on the Motion relating to the Sheriff (Removal from Office) Order. There would be no official vote but it was noted that a number of our backbenchers were expected to vote against the Motion.

(ii) Mr. Churchill would speak in the debate on Mr. Page's Private Members' Motion on 9th December on Pay and Conditions of the Armed Forces. It was important to get a good attendance for this debate.

3. Subjects for the Supply Day

There was a discussion and it was agreed that we were likely to debate, first, the Government amnesty for illegal immigrants and, secondly, the recent order from Poland for British Shipbuilders on the Supply Day on 12th December. The final decision would be taken at the next meeting. It was also agreed that it would be desirable to debate the state of the steel industry early in the new year.

4. Polish Shipbuilding Order

There was a discussion on the Polish Shipbuilding Order and the following points were agreed:

(i) We should make every effort to obtain the fullest information regarding the circumstances and conditions of this deal.

(ii) We should criticize the Government's refusal to reveal the penalty clauses in the contract.

(iii) We should point out that this was not the biggest order ever obtained by a British shipyard. Vosper Thornycroft had, in the past, obtained a larger one from Brazil.

(iv) The Government might be asked to examine the French practice, by which enough warships were built in French shipyards to keep a regular number of men employed and, if these could not be sold to foreign buyers, they were incorporated in the French navy. It was noted that a number of other valid points of inquiry and attack on the Polish contract were contained in Mr. Michael Grylls' letter to the Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee.

5. Speaker's Conference on Parliamentary Representation of Northern Ireland

Mrs. Thatcher reported that we needed to submit evidence to the Conference. There was a discussion and it was agreed that while there was a case for increasing the number of Northern Ireland MPs to 16 or 17 on the basis of the present constitution, this would no longer necessarily apply if Northern Ireland obtained a devolved legislative assembly. There was a case for reducing the quota of seats given to all those parts of the UK where devolved assemblies might be set up, when this had taken place.

5. Rhodesia

Mr. Davies reported on recent events, notably Mr. Smith's declaration at Bulawayo accepting the principle of universal suffrage and his invitation to Bishop Muzorewa and Mr. Sithole to discuss Rhodesia's constitutional future. There was a discussion and it was agreed that Mr. Davies would make a speech the following week indicating, unless the situation changed dramatically, that we thought that all parties who had a substantial stake in the country should be invited to take part in the constitutional discussions provided they kept an undertaking to refrain from hostile acts. Mr. Nkomo and Mr. Mugabe would not be referred to by name in this context.

6. Other business

There was a discussion on the threatened increase of protectionism, particularly regarding Japanese imports, in countries like the USA, Canada and New Zealand. It was agreed that we should give urgent consideration to Britain's interests in this respect and Mr. Nott was invited to submit a paper on trade with Japan for future discussion.

The meeting closed at 6.10 p.m.