

LEADER'S STEERING COMMITTEE

53RD MEETING

Minutes of the 53rd Meeting held at 5.00 p.m.  
on Monday, 13th February 1978, in the Leader's  
Room at the House of Commons.

Present: Mrs. Thatcher (in the Chair)

Mr. Whitelaw, Sir Keith Joseph,  
Lord Carrington, Lord Thorneycroft,  
Sir Geoffrey Howe, Sir Ian Gilmour,  
Mr. Peyton, Mr. Davies, Mr. Maude.

Mr. Atkins.

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

Apologies: Mr. Prior, Mr. Pym.

1. Immigration

Mr. Whitelaw introduced his paper, "The Control of Immigration", LSC(78)64, and pointed out that he and his colleagues were obtaining more information and statistics on the subject all the time.

There was a discussion and the paper was generally agreed subject to the following points:

(1) With regard to Section 6(111) on page 4, we should obtain confirmation as to what section of the Immigration Act 1971 permitted changes in the immigration rules, and we should also confirm that Conservative Ministers had indicated during the debates on the Immigration Act 1971 and on the immigration rules that the Government had this power. We should have to decide at a future meeting whether, and in what way, we should change the rules regarding the entry of the wives and children of those who had entered the U.K. after 1st January 1973 and had since then obtained the right of permanent settlement. We should also seek to obtain statistics on the numbers that were likely to be affected by any such change in the rules.

(ii) We should examine the desirability of reducing the age limit for the entry of dependent children, taking into account, in particular, the difficulty of obtaining an adequate knowledge of English after a certain age, and the Select Committee's recommendations.

(iii) We would reverse the 1974 Concession over male fiances, as it was clear that it had been greatly abused.

(iv) Further consideration would be given to the position of foreign or Commonwealth women who married British citizens and thus acquired the right of settlement.

(v) In agreeing the proposal in Section 6(V) over restricting the issue of work permits, we accepted that this might cause the hotel industry some inconvenience.

(vi) We should indicate that we reserved the right to impose a quota on wives and children, if the number of those entitled to come to Britain revealed by the proposed register in Section 7, was very large. We could indicate that if the figures for dependants, suggested on various occasions, proved to be correct a quota would clearly be required.

(vii) We should, at all times, use Home Office figures, obtained and confirmed where necessary by written priority questions. In particular, we should ask the Home Office to give their latest estimates on the number of dependants who were entitled to come to Britain and we should also confirm the figures of the numbers of "patrials" in Rhodesia who could, if necessary, come to Britain.

(viii) Mr. Jenkins would be asked to check what documents proving legal entry were required by immigrants who were in receipt of social security payments.

(ix) While accepting the proposal that there should be no amnesties for illegal immigrants from a Conservative Government we should reserve the right to concede the right of settlement where this was clearly justified on technical grounds.

(x) We disagreed with suggestions for obliging all British citizens to carry identity cards, but we should discover what entry certificates or other proof was obtained by legal immigrants and what documents they used to obtain a British passport similar to the production of the birth certificate by British citizens born in the U.K.

(xi) In Government we should provide both more money for assisted passages for immigrants who wished to return to their countries of origin and we should publicise these facilities more than had been done in the past. We should not, however, draw attention to these proposals while in Opposition.

(xii) Sir Michael Havers would check whether any amnesty gave those benefiting from it the right to bring in their dependants.

2. Future discussion

There would be a special meeting of the Shadow Cabinet the following Monday at 5.00 p.m. Members would obtain a slightly redrafted copy of the paper omitting mention of identity cards and the proposal to assist repatriation.

3. Publicity

There was a discussion on how to publicise our proposals. It was agreed that Mr. Whitelaw would decide how he wished to handle this. What appeared to be preferable was for him to make a major speech, or give a Press Conference, outside Parliament about which the friendly press would be alerted. We could then speedily follow this up with a Supply Day on immigration and would seek to force the Government to vote against our proposals.

The following points were also agreed:

(i) If we were asked what was the acceptable level of future immigration, we would indicate that the Government would have to decide this in the light of what was revealed by the register and the unemployment, housing, education and social services position in the country at the time.

(ii) If we were asked what our view would be if the list of dependants was excessive we should indicate that this was a hypothetical question and could only be resolved once the register was constituted.

(iii) We should not lose sight of the fact that there were a number of useful quotations from Mr. Callaghan, including those in the Crossman diaries.

(iv) There would be a further discussion on the timing and nature of publicity at the Shadow Cabinet meeting on the amended paper.

The meeting closed at 7.30 p.m.