

LEADER'S STEERING COMMITTEE

Minutes of the 36th Meeting held at 5.00 p.m.
on Monday, 26th January 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. Maudling²
Mr. Prior, Mr. Pym, Mr. Gilmour
Mr. Maude, Lord Thorneycroft

Mr. Atkins

Mr. Hurd, Sir Peter Kirk
Sir Anthony Royle,
Mr. Scott-Hopkins

In attendance: Mr. Butler, Mr. Stanley
Mr. Patten, Mr. Ridley
Mr. Turner, Mr. Nicholson

Apologies: Sir Geoffrey Howe

1. Direct Elections to the European Parliament

Mr. Maudling and Sir Anthony Royle introduced the paper LSC/76/39 on Direct Elections to the European Parliament. There was a preliminary but extensive discussion.

It was agreed that:

- i) The Conservative Party was committed to the principle of direct elections.
- ii) The Government would have to decide whether or not the May 1978 target date was feasible for the first direct elections.
- iii) The section of the paper on the transitional period was approved.
- iv) Further statistical work was needed on the effects of the size of the Parliament, on the best system for electing its members, and on the representation of the various parts of the UK with special reference to the urban/rural balance within the proposed single-member constituencies. Lord Thorneycroft and Sir Anthony Royle had arranged a meeting the following week to discuss how the Policy Group should pursue its work on these questions as well as on the impact of direct elections on the Party Organisation.
- v) We should remain very reluctant to move towards any system of PR for any elections.
- vi) The dual mandate was impractical, but it should remain possible for a member to belong to both Westminster and Strasbourg Parliaments.

vii) While the idea of a Standing Committee on European Affairs, proposed in the report, met with no enthusiasm, it was necessary to ensure a close link between the members of the European Parliament and Westminster.

viii) A four-year Parliament would probably be preferable to a five-year Parliament, and it was desirable for elections to take place simultaneously across the whole EEC. Accordingly, there should be no link between direct elections and general elections.

ix) There should be a residential qualification for British members of the Parliament.

x) Timing and Action

As there was likely to be a debate on direct elections in the Commons on or around 16th February the Shadow Cabinet would discuss the matter on Wednesday 28th January. After this, Mr. Maudling would indicate our initial reactions to Mr. Callaghan, especially with reference to the comparable representation of Scotland and Luxembourg.

2. Other Business

It was agreed that:

i) The Supply Day on Thursday 4th February should be offered to the minority parties. Mr. Atkins would ascertain that there was no danger of the Supply Day being moved to earlier in the week, since, if the Scottish National Party took it, they might use the occasion to help them in a key Scottish local by-election.

ii) As the Government was putting down a Motion for the debate on the employment situation on Thursday 29th January we should move an amendment. A small group would discuss the wording of the amendment.

The meeting closed at 6.30 p.m.