

LEADER'S CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

Minutes of the 238th Meeting held at 5.00 p.m. on Wednesday, 21st March 1979, in the Leader's Room at the House of Commons.

Present: Mrs. Thatcher (in the Chair)

Mr. Whitelaw, Sir Keith Joseph, Lord Carrington, Lord Thorncroft, Sir Geoffrey Howe, Mr. Prior, Mr. Pym, Sir Ian Gilmour, Mr. Jenkin, Mr. Peyton, Mr. Heseltine, Mr. St. John Stevas, Mr. Maude, Mr. Edwards, Mr. Nott, Mrs. Oppenheim, Mr. King, Mr. Taylor, Mr. Carlisle, Mr. Biffen.

Mr. Atkins.

In attendance: Sir Michael Havers, Mr. Fowler, Lord Denham, Mr. Butler, Mr. Stanley, Mr. Wolfson, Mr. Patten, Mr. Nicholson, Mr. Browne-Clayton.

Apologies: Lord Hailsham, Mr. Neave.

1. Proposed Business for the Week 26th March-2nd April

On Monday, 26th March, there would be a debate on the Statement on the Defence Estimates Cmnd. 7474 (1st Day). This would be followed by a Motion on EEC Documents R/2712/78, R/2311/78 and R/2163/78 on the Communities Energy Policy (Mr. King) and the Remaining Stages of the Forestry Bill (Lords) (Mr. Jopling) and Motions on the Redundant Mineworkers Concessionary Coal Order and on the Mineworkers' Pension Scheme Order (Mr. Lester).

On Tuesday, 27th March, Mr. Ridley would seek leave to introduce his Deductions from Wages Bill under the 10 Minute Rule. This would be followed by the Conclusion of the debate on the Statement on the Defence Estimates and the Remaining Stages of the Public Health Laboratory Service Bill (Lords) (Mr. Jenkin).

On Wednesday, 28th March, there would be the Second Reading of the Legal Aid Bill (Sir Michael Havers). This would be followed by the Remaining Stages of the Credit Unions Bill (Messrs. Rees and Stewart) and Opposed Private Business.

On Thursday, 29th March, Mr. Viggers would seek leave to introduce his Services Widows (Provision of Pensions) Bill under the 10 Minute Rule. This would be followed by the Remaining Stages of the Independent Broadcasting Authority Bill (Messrs. Whitelaw and Critchley) and a debate on the White Paper on Broadcasting (Cmnd. 7294) and a Motion on the BBC Supplemental Charter and Licence Agreement.

On Friday, 30th March, there would be the Private Members' Bills of Mr. Mitchell, Mr. Burden and Mr. Abse.

On Monday, 2nd April, there would be the Second Reading of the Housing Bill. This would be followed by a debate on Fisheries or on CAP.

2. Matters Arising on Business

There was a discussion and the following points were agreed:

(i) There would be a 2-line Whip for the debate on the Community's Energy Policy on 26th March, and we would vote against the motion as it endorsed the Government's policy.

(ii) We would vote against the Government's motion at the conclusion of the debate on the Defence Estimates, and would not move an amendment. If the Labour Left moved an amendment we should vote with the Government against it.

(iii) There would be a backbenchers' operation on the Cheshire County Council Bill on 28th March, similar to that which took place on the Merseyside County Council Bill.

(iv) We should press the Government to arrange for the debate on the White Paper on Broadcasting on 29th March to precede the debate on the Remaining Stages of the Independent Broadcasting Authority Bill.

3. Reactions to the Government's Statement on Devolution

There was a discussion of the various lines the Government might take in this statement and how we should respond to them. It was noted that Lord Home was making a speech indicating that he thought no further steps should be taken on the Devolution issue until the orders repealing the Acts had been laid and debated and there had been a General Election. The following points were agreed:

(i) We should not table a No Confidence motion unless the SNP, the Liberals, and, if possible, the Welsh Nationalists gave firm assurances of support.

(ii) It was wrong for the Government to propose all-party talks before a firm decision had been taken by the House on the repeal of the Acts. We should also indicate that the Government had previously rejected our offers on talks on the subject, and that it was undesirable for such discussions to take place in a dying Parliament.

(iii) Members were requested to inform Mrs. Thatcher's office of any reports they received as to the Government's intentions or the intentions of the minority parties.

4. Policy Work

(a) The following papers on Policy were requested:

(i) Mr. Heseltine and Mr. Alison to prepare a short paper on what we should say on rates in the election,

(ii) Mr. St. John Stevas to prepare a short paper on Constitutional and Procedural matters.

(iii) Mrs. Oppenheim would revise her paper on Competition Policy in the light of the views expressed by colleagues.

(iv) Mr. Fowler to prepare a short paper on Concessionary Fares.

(v) Mr. Prior to prepare a short paper on the results of his work on various aspects of trade union law and on what should be said during the campaign.

(b) Constitutional Convention

It was agreed that we should not say anything about our thoughts on this until Lord Hailsham had been further consulted.

(c) Animals

Mr. Whitelaw reported on the views of his backbench committee. It was agreed that we would not support a Standing Royal Commission on animal welfare, that Mr. Mills should speak in the debate on Friday, 23rd March, that Mr. Whitelaw would follow this up with a statement and that there would be a section on this subject in the Manifesto.

5. Agriculture

Mr. Peyton introduced his paper (LCC/79/194). There was a discussion and it was agreed that we should take a final decision at the next meeting on the line we would take when and if the Government tabled a motion to devalue the green pound by 5%.