

LEADER'S CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

Minutes of the 198th Meeting held at 5.00 p.m. on Wednesday, 12th April 1978, in the Leader's Room at the House of Commons.

Present: Mrs. Thatcher

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

Mr. Atkins

In Attendance: Lord Denham, Sir Michael Havers,
Dr. Vaughan, Mr. Lawson, Mr. Butler,
Mr. Stanley, Mr. Patten, Mr. Ridley
Mr. Nicholson, Miss Bulloch.

Apologies: Sir Geoffrey Howe, Mr. Davies,
Mr. Jenkin, Mr. Edwards.

1. Proposed Business for the Week 17th-24th April

On Monday, 17th April there would be the conclusion of the debate on the Budget, (Mr. Lawson, Mr. Nott). This would be followed by the Second Reading of the Judicature (Northern Ireland) Bill (Mr. Neave).

On Tuesday, 18th April Mr. M. Neubert would seek leave to introduce his Shops (Amendment) Bill under the 10 Minute Rule. This would be followed by the 7th Day of the Committee Stage of the Wales Bill (Mr. Pym and team).

On Wednesday, 19th April, Mr. Mates would seek leave to introduce his Southern Rhodesia (Amendment) Bill. This would be followed by the 8th Day of the Committee Stage of the Wales Bill (Mr. Pym and team).

On Thursday, 20th April, there would be a Supply Day. This would be followed by the remaining stages of the Medical Bill (Dr. Vaughan).

On Friday, 21st April, there would be the Private Members' Bills of Mr. Mikardo, Mr. R. Bennett and Mr. R. Hodgson.

On Monday, 24th April, there would be the Second Reading of the Nuclear Safeguards and Electricity (Finance) Bill (Mr. King) and the Lords Amendments to the Shipbuilding (Redundancy Payments) Bill (Mr. Lamont).

2. Matters Arising on Business

There was a discussion of certain points and the following was agreed:

1) Mr. Ian Percival would speak on the Second Reading of the Judicature (Northern Ireland) Bill on 17th April.

ii) We would seek to find out more about the Southern Rhodesia (Amendment) Bill on 19th April.

3. Subjects for the Supply Day

There was a discussion and the following was agreed:

1) We would debate the NHS on the Supply Day on 20th April. Mr. Jenkin and Dr. Vaughan would be our speakers, but we would not vote and would hope that Labour backbenchers would also criticise the present situation in the Health Service.

ii) Subjects for future debates would include threats to press freedom; the activities of SLADE and the NGA; the industrial strategy (but not in the near future) and fisheries (a half day before the Scottish Party Conference).

iii) We should wait until some of the heat had gone out of the immigration issue before seeking to debate it on Supply.

4. Private Members' Bills

Mr. Prior reported on the preparations for the debate on the Private Members' bills of Mr. Fletcher and Mr. Mikardo. It was noted that we would try and obtain Mr. Townsend's Bill on child pornography "on the nod" and suggest that any necessary amendments to it could be made in the Lords.

5. The Budget Resolutions

There was a discussion on the Budget, and in particular on the voting on the Budget resolutions on the following Monday, 17th April. It was noted that there appeared to be some disarray in the ranks of the Parliamentary Liberal Party as to precisely what changes in the Budget they would press for. The following points were agreed:

1) We would not vote against the resolution to tighten up certain of the rules on tax avoidance, despite the retrospective nature of some of these provisions.

ii) We would vote against the general resolution to amend the law, subject to discussion at Business Committee and the views of Sir Geoffrey Howe, who was detained in the Chamber.

iii) We would seek to make whatever changes we wished to make to the standard rate of income tax by amendment during the Committee Stage of the Finance Bill.

iv) We should emphasise that the yield of taxation was, despite the Budget, still increasing in real terms, and even more so in money terms, while public spending was also increasing, with a threatened consequential inflationary effect.

6. Northern Ireland Representation

It was noted that Mr. Mason was likely to indicate, in answer to a Parliamentary Question, that the Government supported the recommendations of the Speaker's Conference for an increase to between 16 and 18 in the number of Northern Ireland seats in the House of Commons, but that the Government were unlikely to be able to provide time for legislation this Session. It was agreed that if the statement appeared inadequate and we should press the Government for a fuller indication of their intentions. We should also discuss, at the all-day meeting the following Monday, what course of action we might take.

7. Other Business

There were short discussions on a number of other subjects; and various points were agreed:

a) Local Government

It was noted that Mr. Heseltine was preparing to circulate a paper about the powers of local government vis a vis central government departments for discussion, initially by the interested backbench committees and later, if appropriate, by the Leader's Consultative Committee.

b) It was desirable to have a further discussion on the United Nations and South-West Africa, and a paper would be prepared in due course after Mr. Davies' return from abroad.

c) We should "pray" against the Government's proposals to set a maximum price for bread on a 2 line whip.

d) Metrication

We should not in any way assist the Government to obtain their orders for using the sanctions of fines and even imprisonment to enforce further progress on metrication, and we should tell the CBI that such measures were not likely to pass through Parliament.

e) Scotland Bill

We should consider how much time the House of Lords was likely to give to deliberations on the Scotland Bill.

f) European Assembly Elections

A small group of members of the LCC should discuss how we should seek to avoid sitting MPs resigning from the House of Commons after the next election on order to stand for the European Assembly, thus creating a number of by-elections.

The meeting closed at 6.10 pm.