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C.M. (45)

25th Conclusions.

CABINET 25 (45).

CONCLUSIONS of a Meeting of the Cabinet held at 10 Downing Street, S.W. 1, on Thursday, 23rd August, 1945, at 11 a.m.

Present :

The Right Hon. C. R. ATTLEE, M.P., Prime Minister (*in the Chair*).

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| The Right Hon. HERBERT MORRISON, M.P., Lord President of the Council. | The Right Hon. ERNEST BEVIN, M.P., Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs (<i>Item 1</i>). |
| The Right Hon. ARTHUR GREENWOOD, M.P., Lord Privy Seal. | The Right Hon. HUGH DALTON, M.P., Chancellor of the Exchequer. |
| The Right Hon. Sir STAFFORD CRIPPS, K.C., M.P., President of the Board of Trade. | The Right Hon. A. V. ALEXANDER, M.P., First Lord of the Admiralty. |
| The Right Hon. LORD JOWITT, Lord Chancellor. | The Right Hon. J. CHUTER EDE, M.P., Secretary of State for the Home Department. |
| The Right Hon. VISCOUNT ADDISON, Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs. | The Right Hon. LORD PETHICK-LAWRENCE, Secretary of State for India and Secretary of State for Burma. |
| The Right Hon. G. H. HALL, M.P., Secretary of State for the Colonies. | The Right Hon. J. J. LAWSON, M.P., Secretary of State for War. |
| The Right Hon. VISCOUNT STANSGATE, Secretary of State for Air. | The Right Hon. J. WESTWOOD, M.P., Secretary of State for Scotland. |
| The Right Hon. G. A. ISAACS, M.P., Minister of Labour and National Service. | The Right Hon. E. SHINWELL, M.P., Minister of Fuel and Power. |
| The Right Hon. ELLEN WILKINSON, M.P., Minister of Education. | The Right Hon. ANEURIN BEVAN, M.P., Minister of Health. |

The Right Hon. T. WILLIAMS, M.P.,
Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries.

The following were also present :

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| Mr. G. TOMLINSON, M.P., Minister of Works (<i>Items 1 and 2</i>). | Sir ORME SARGENT, Deputy Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs (<i>Item 1</i>). |
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Secretariat.

Sir EDWARD BRIDGES.
Mr. NORMAN BROOK.
Sir GILBERT LAITHWAITE.

CABINET 25 (45)

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Syria and the
Lebanon.

(Previous
Reference:
C.M. (45) 5th
Conclusions,
Minute 2.)

1. The Cabinet had before them a Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs (C.P. (45) 123) containing proposals for seeking a settlement of the Levant problem.

The Foreign Secretary summarised the main points in his proposals as follows:—

(i) We had already made it clear that British troops would be withdrawn from the Levant States as soon as the French troops went, and there were indications that the French might now be prepared to agree to total withdrawal of troops. They were, however, suspicious of our intentions and feared that, if withdrawal of troops were followed by a breakdown of law and order necessitating intervention by troops, British troops would be employed for this purpose. He therefore proposed that it should be made clear to all concerned that if, after withdrawal, disturbances occurred on a scale necessitating intervention, it would be the French who would send troops to deal with the situation. It must be understood, however, that French troops could not be sent back on the initiative of the French Government alone: and the Governments of the United Kingdom and United States would have also to be agreed that the situation necessitated such intervention.

(ii) The foreign advisers required, if Syria and the Lebanon were to have security forces efficient enough to enable them to maintain order, should not be British. The local Governments should be urged to recruit them from some disinterested country, *e.g.*, Sweden or Denmark.

(iii) The question of military bases in the Levant should be left over to be dealt with by the World Organisation.

(iv) The Syrians and Lebanese should give guarantees as regards the proper treatment of legitimate French interests in the Levant—French schools should receive treatment as favourable as that accorded to the American schools.

(v) The local Governments should be informed that British assistance in the purchase and distribution of wheat could not be continued after the withdrawal of our forces, and they must at once put in hand arrangements for taking over full responsibility for this work. They should also be warned that His Majesty's Government could accept no liability, *e.g.*, in respect of additional imports, in the event of a breakdown in these arrangements.

The Foreign Secretary said that these were tentative proposals which would form the starting point in the discussions. The outcome of the discussions might be different. It was, however, essential that we should try to break the present vicious circle. At the moment the temper of the French was easier, and if we were able to approach them with definite proposals on the lines now suggested, some progress might be made. It was important that we should make some move in this matter before the meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers. Before opening discussions, however, he wished to know whether he would have the support of the Cabinet in making an approach to the problem on these lines.

Discussion centred on the following points:—

(a) Attention was drawn to the importance of the wording of any announcement to be made on this matter. We must not risk any misunderstanding on the part of the Syrians and the Lebanese or give the impression that, if disorder broke out, the French would be free to send in troops at their own discretion.

The Foreign Secretary said that his first anxiety was to reach some agreement with the other Governments concerned, and he had not yet given consideration to the terms of any announcement. If, however, agreement were reached on the proposals set out in this Memorandum, it would be clear that French troops could not be sent back unless the Governments of the United States and the United Kingdom, as well as the French Government, were satisfied that this was necessary.

(b) Would it not be expedient to bring the Soviet Government into these discussions? Should we not at least invite them to take

part? If they declined, we should have a complete reply to the Parliamentary criticism which might be expected if they were left out. Russia already showed signs of an exaggerated sense of isolation; and we should do nothing to aggravate this.

It was pointed out, on the other hand, that the Soviet Government had expressed no desire to be associated with these discussions. The area was one with which they had never been closely concerned, and there would be risk of grave misunderstanding in Turkey, with the question of the Straits still unsettled, and in the Middle East generally, if we now brought Russia into these discussions.

(c) Would it assist in meeting any objection to the exclusion of the Soviet Government if we refrained from bringing the United States Government into the discussions? Was there any reason to think that they would be prepared to co-operate on the basis proposed? And were their interests in the area sufficiently great to justify their association with the action proposed?

The Foreign Secretary said that he did not know what the attitude of the United States Government would be. They had, however, a very definite interest in this area. They had Mission Schools there. And they were closely interested in the whole Mediterranean problem and, in his judgment, it was most important that an invitation should be extended to them.

(d) Would there be advantage in treating the matter more broadly and taking the line that agreement would have to be reached internationally without at this stage specifying the Powers concerned?

The Foreign Secretary thought that such a procedure would be dangerous in advance of any decision as regards Mandates and Territorial Trusteeship.

The Prime Minister, summing up this part of the discussion, said that there were great advantages in dealing with this matter on a three-Power basis between the French, the United States and ourselves. The position was that we were in occupation in this area and were trying to get out of it. The French, who held a Mandate for it, were closely and directly concerned with it. The United States had certain interests in it. The proposal now before the Cabinet afforded a means of seeking a possible solution which would avoid the appearance of competition between France and Great Britain.

(e) *The Secretary of State for War* said that neither the Syrians nor the Lebanese were yet in a position to assure us of their capacity to maintain order when foreign troops were withdrawn. General Paget was due to arrive in this country next week, and he suggested that this part of the problem should be discussed with him before a final decision was taken.

The Foreign Secretary said that he would be very ready to see General Paget but he wished meanwhile to make some progress with the discussion of the general policy. It was, of course, essential that the local Governments should press on with the organisation of their Gendarmerie; and there would be no question of our withdrawing until we were satisfied that the local Governments had a reasonable prospect of being able to maintain order.

(f) *The President of the Board of Trade* thought there was serious risk of a breakdown in food supplies on the withdrawal of the wheat-buying and distributing organisation at present run by the British military authorities. Would it not be possible to put the military personnel concerned on to a civilian basis and allow them to carry on for a time under the local Governments?

The Foreign Secretary said that he was willing that this suggestion should be considered, and he would amend his proposals on this point (paragraph 8 of C.P. (45) 123) so as to read "British assistance cannot be continued indefinitely after the withdrawal of our Forces."

The Cabinet—

Agreed that the Foreign Secretary should initiate discussions on this matter on the general lines indicated in C.P. (45) 123, subject to the points noted at (e) and (f) above.

Civil Defence.

Proposed
Suspension of
Civil Defence
Acts, 1937-39.
(Previous
Reference:
W.M. (45) 1st
Conclusions,
Minute 10.)

2. The Cabinet had before them a Memorandum by the Home Secretary (C.P. (45) 124) proposing the early introduction of legislation suspending the obligations which the Civil Defence Acts imposed on local authorities and others to make preparations against the risk of air attack, but empowering the Secretary of State to revive any of these suspended obligations by Order in Council, either generally or in particular areas, when he thought it expedient.

There was general support for the proposal to introduce legislation on the lines proposed in the Home Secretary's Memorandum.

Discussion turned on the extent to which it was necessary to maintain a system of air-raid precautions. It was generally agreed that the Home Office should continue to carry on research and planning for the future of civil defence. There was, however, some divergence of view on the extent to which the nucleus of a civil defence organisation should be maintained throughout the country. In discussion of this question the following points were raised:—

(a) Much experience had been gained during the war in the local organisation of civil defence; and it would be wasteful to let the existing organisation disappear without any attempt to hold together a nucleus of those who had acquired this special experience. A proposal to retain a nucleus of the existing organisation would excite little public attention: to establish a new organisation later on would be more difficult and would give rise to much more public comment.

(b) On the other side, it was contended that a skeleton organisation for local civil defence services would either become moribund for lack of functions; or, if it were given functions to keep it alive, would become a nuisance.

(c) When the legislation proposed by the Home Secretary was introduced, it might be necessary to indicate whether the nucleus of a local organisation for civil defence was to be maintained. Some Ministers felt that public avowal at this stage of an intention to retain a skeleton organisation would seem inconsistent with confidence in the future of the World Organisation. Other Ministers took the view that the Government could not yet be expected to proceed on the assumption that no preparations need be made against future war; and made the further point that it would be much less alarming to public opinion, both in this country and abroad, to maintain the nucleus of an existing organisation than to be forced at some future date to take fresh steps for the creation of a new organisation.

(d) *The Minister of Works* said that his Department would need guidance on the extent to which regard should be paid to civil defence considerations in the construction of new buildings. War-time experience had shown the value of steel-frame buildings with cellars. Was it desirable that his Department should give a lead, in the construction of buildings (*e.g.*, Post Offices) for which they were responsible, by concentrating on this form of building and making the cellars stronger than they need otherwise be?

The view was expressed that, if the Ministry of Works showed any preference for this type of building, they should base it on the increased advantages from the point of view of fire-risk rather than its value for air-raid shelter.

(e) It was pointed out that, until more was known of the effects and the future of the atomic bomb, it would not be possible to reach any firm conclusions about the future organisation of civil defence, or the standards of protection required in buildings, &c.

The Cabinet—

- (1) Approved the proposals put forward in C.P. (45) 124 for the early introduction of legislation to suspend the Civil Defence Acts, 1937-39.
- (2) Invited the Home Secretary to review, in the light of the discussion, the question of maintaining a nucleus of the local organisation for civil defence; and to submit his proposals in the first instance to the Lord President's Committee.

Education.

Raising of
School Leaving
Age.

3. The Cabinet considered Memoranda by the Minister of Education (C.P. (45) 117) and the Secretary of State for Scotland (C.P. (45) 119) proposing that local education authorities should now be informed that the school leaving age would be raised to 15 on the 1st April, 1947.

The Minister of Education said that the raising of the age could not be postponed beyond the 1st April, 1947, without fresh legislation. Local education authorities would not, however, press on with their administrative preparations unless it was made clear that the Government were firmly resolved to adhere to this date. From the political point of view it was clearly undesirable that this Government should have to postpone the date; and there was every reason for pressing local authorities to make ready for the 1947 date, if it were practicable to complete the necessary preparations in time. The Minister said that she had gone very carefully into the requirements, both for teachers and for accommodation, and she was satisfied that these could be met in time if a sufficient allocation of man-power were made to the educational services. The details could be taken up with the Man-Power Committee: what she required was a decision of principle that the school leaving age should be raised on the 1st April, 1947, and that local education authorities should be told at once that they must make their preparations accordingly.

The Secretary of State for Scotland supported this proposal. He had not yet been able to frame precise estimates of the accommodation and man-power involved in Scotland. The physical difficulties were, however, less in Scotland than in England and Wales, where air-raid damage had been more extensive; and he believed that the necessary preparations could be completed in time. He was aware that some people took the view that it would be preferable to delay the raising of the school age rather than continue to have overcrowded classes. He did not share this view: he attached very great importance to raising the leaving age by the latest date specified in the Act.

The Secretary of State added that, if the Cabinet approved the proposals now before them, the announcement in respect of Scotland should be made simultaneously with that relating to England and Wales.

There was general agreement that from the political point of view it would be a great embarrassment to the present Government to have to bring forward legislation postponing the raising of the school leaving age beyond the latest date determined by the last Parliament. Discussion turned on the question whether it would be practicable to complete the preparations required in time to permit of the age being raised on the 1st April, 1947. The main points raised in discussion were:—

(a) Had the implications of this proposal, as regards man-power and building resources, been discussed with the other Ministers concerned?

The Minister of Education said that the building requirements up to the end of 1945 had been discussed with the Ministry of Works. Figures for 1946 were now available and could be discussed

with the interested Departments. It would be necessary to ask the Minister of Health to raise, in respect of schools, the existing ban on new building in the London area.

(b) As regards teachers, it was stated in C.P. (45) 117 that, apart from the 13,000 additional teachers required to match the increased number of pupils, a much larger number would be needed to replace the married women and teachers over the normal age of retirement who might leave the profession in the near future. Had any estimate been made of this further requirement?

The Minister of Education said that about 25,000 would be required to replace the abnormal wastage, and a further 20,000 if the size of classes was to be reduced to the desired level.

(c) *The Lord President of the Council* said that, before any public announcement was made, the Government must be satisfied that it would, in fact, be practicable to complete the preparations required in time. There would certainly be criticism if the date had to be deferred. But there might well be even more damaging criticism if proper preparations could not be made before 1947 and, as a result, there was overcrowding of classes, shortage of teachers and a lower standard of education.

(d) *The Home Secretary* said that it had been the intention of the former Minister of Education to raise the age on the 30th September, 1946. He himself thought it preferable that the age should be raised in April, rather than September, because of the relation between primary and secondary education; and he strongly favoured a decision to raise the age on the 1st April, 1947. It should be borne in mind that, if this were done, many children would not be affected until September 1947; and it would not be until April 1948 that the full effect of raising the age would be felt. A further point was that in many parts of the country there was an excess of accommodation in the schools because of the drop in the child population. Educationally, it would be preferable to reduce the size of classes rather than raise the school leaving age; but politically he had no doubt that this Government must make every effort to carry out the provisions of the Act, which gave effect to a policy which the Labour Party had advocated for many years past. As regards the attitude of local education authorities, he strongly endorsed the views of the Minister of Education. No progress would be made with the preparations required until it was made clear that the Government were firmly resolved to raise the age on the 1st April, 1947. If there were further postponement, progressive education authorities would be disheartened and the less progressive authorities would be confirmed in their view that the raising of the age could be postponed indefinitely.

(e) *The Minister of Health* said that, while he agreed that the date should not be deferred, he would deprecate any early announcement because of its effect on the housing programme. Many local authorities were responsible for both education and housing: they had been urged to give immediate attention to their housing programmes: and it was undesirable at this moment, when there was a grave shortage of technical staffs, that their attention should be diverted to the problem of school accommodation. He fully recognised that, in planning new housing estates, proper provision should be made for schools, but it was one thing to insist on such provision being made, and another to require that the building of the schools should be put in hand at once. He also made the point, with reference to paragraph 6 of C.P. (45) 117 and paragraph 5 of C.P. (45) 119, that it was undesirable that those responsible for allocating building resources should have their hands tied by any over-riding obligation to meet in full the requirements of the education services.

The Prime Minister, summing up the discussion, said that the Cabinet were agreed in principle that it was desirable that the school leaving age should be raised to 15 on the 1st April, 1947; and that

a public announcement to that effect should be made as soon as the Government were satisfied that it would in fact be practicable to complete the necessary preparations in time to enable this to be done. A Committee of Ministers should consider, as a matter of urgency, whether these preparations could be completed in time, consistently with a proper allocation of resources to the other essential national needs, including housing.

The Cabinet—

Invited the Lord President of the Council to arrange for the appointment of an *ad hoc* Committee comprising the Ministers primarily concerned, to consider and report to the Cabinet as soon as possible on the practical implications of a decision that the school leaving age should be raised to 15 on the 1st April, 1947.

Cabinet Office, S.W. 1,
23rd August, 1945.



