CONCLUSIONS of a Meeting of the Cabinet held at 10 Downing Street, S.W. 1, on Tuesday, 22nd June, 1948, at 10 a.m.

Present:

The Right Hon. C. R. Attlee, M.P., Prime Minister (in the Chair).
The Right Hon. Herbert Morrison, M.P., Lord President of the Council (Item 3).
The Right Hon. A. V. Alexander, M.P., Minister of Defence.
The Right Hon. Viscount Addison, Lord Privy Seal.
The Right Hon. J. Chuter Ede, M.P., Secretary of State for the Home Department.
The Right Hon. Aneurin Bevan, M.P., Minister of Health.
The Right Hon. George Tomlinson, M.P., Minister of Education.

The Right Hon. Sir Stafford Cripps, K.C., M.P., Chancellor of the Exchequer.
The Right Hon. Viscount Jowitt, Lord Chancellor.
The Right Hon. A. Creech Jones, M.P., Secretary of State for the Colonies (Items 2-3).
The Right Hon. A. Woodburn, M.P., Secretary of State for Scotland (Item 1).
The Right Hon. T. Williams, M.P., Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries.
The Right Hon. J. H. Wilson, M.P., President of the Board of Trade.

The following were also present:
The Right Hon. Alfred Barnes, M.P., Minister of Transport (Item 1).
The Right Hon. John Strachey, M.P., Minister of Food.
The Right Hon. Ness Edwards, M.P., Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Labour and National Service (Item 1).

Secretariat:

Sir Norman Brook.
Mr. W. S. Murrie.
## CABINET 51 (46)

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Industrial Disputes.
London Dock Workers' Strike.

1. The Cabinet were informed of the latest developments in the strike of London dockers.

The strike had so far been confined to London and efforts to bring out dockers in other areas had hitherto failed. It had, however, spread to the cold-storage workers in London and it might affect the meat markets. A meeting was to be held in the Albert Hall that morning at which the General Secretary of the Transport and General Workers' Union would advise the strikers to return to work. The Union leaders had rejected a suggestion that this meeting should be held in the Victoria Park, but some of the strikers were to hold a meeting simultaneously with the other meeting. The General Secretary of the Union was fairly confident that the Albert Hall meeting would be successful, but the strikers would probably be reluctant to return to work unless some move was made which would enable them to do so without loss of face. The Parliamentary Secretary, Minister of Labour, had spoken to the Foreign Secretary, who thought that care should be taken to avoid encouraging the formation of a breakaway union and that there might be a case for reviewing the operation of the disciplinary machinery in the London area. It was therefore suggested that the statement on the situation which was to be made in reply to a Private Notice Question later in the day might include an indication that, if the Union asked for a review of the operation of the disciplinary machinery, the Government would be prepared to assist in this matter.

The Cabinet were shown copies of a report by the Official Emergencies Co-ordinating Committee on the measures proposed for meeting the situation created by the strike. The General Secretary of the Union was not prepared to call for volunteers to handle the perishable foods now lying in the docks, and it was therefore recommended that 300 members of the Services should be brought in on 23rd June to remove these goods and that, if the commercial lorry drivers refused to work with them, 150 Service lorries and their drivers should also be called in. These men and vehicles were ready for employment at short notice. If the strike continued, members of the Services should also be used to move non-perishable foods; and it was estimated that 4,275 men, 123 crane drivers and 120 lightermen would probably be required for this purpose. The Services could make available the numbers required, but these would include only about 40 trained stevedores and it would be ten to fourteen days before the Service gangs would be fully effective. It was also estimated that about 3,000 vehicles with drivers would be required and the Services should be able to provide this number within the same period. If the strike extended to the meat market an additional 5,000 men would be needed. The General Secretary of the Union had agreed that, if the strike continued, the Government would have no alternative but to use troops to load and unload the ships.

In discussion there was general agreement that, while the precise terms of the statement to be made later in the day must depend on the result of the Albert Hall meeting, it should give a full account of the course of events and make clear the Government's view that the strike could not be justified. It should not hold out any hope of an enquiry into the operation of the disciplinary machinery, though it might be appropriate to examine this matter after the strike was over. Once the ill-feeling connected with the strike had subsided, the Government might also urge the Union to bring home to the workers the benefits which they derived from the decasualisation scheme and to impress on them that unjustifiable strike action would inevitably undermine the scheme.

The Cabinet were also agreed that, should the strike continue, all possible steps should be taken to arrange for the movement with the aid of the Services of cargoes both of perishable and of non-perishable foods.
The Cabinet—

(1) Took note that a full statement on the lines agreed in discussion would be made in the House of Commons later in the day.

(2) Agreed that arrangements should be made to begin the unloading of perishable food-stuffs, with the aid of members of the Services and, if necessary, Service vehicles, from the morning of 23rd June; and that immediate steps should be taken to supplement the available troops and Service vehicles to the extent proposed in the report of the Official Emergencies Coordinating Committee in order to enable the movement of non-perishable food-stuffs to be undertaken should the strike continue.

(3) Invited the Minister of Labour, in consultation with the Minister of Transport, to consider and report what improvements could be made in the operation of the dock labour decasualisation scheme and what propaganda in favour of the scheme could be undertaken among the dockers with a view to reducing the risk of further dockers' strikes.

Food.
Supplies of Cereals.
(Previous Reference: C.M.(47)84th Conclusions, Minute 2.)

2. The Cabinet considered memoranda by the Minister of Food (C.P. (48) 152) and the Minister of Agriculture (C.P. (48) 153) on grain supplies for the United Kingdom in 1948–49.

The Minister of Food proposed that bread rationing should be abolished from 1st July. To avoid waste, supplies of flour would be restricted to 103,000 tons a week. Bakers would receive allocations based on their consumption of flour in the period before rationing and 3,000 tons would be kept in reserve to meet exceptional difficulties. The Minister also proposed that from 1st July oatmeal should be freed from points rationing, that barley products should continue unrationed, that 20,000 tons of maize should be substituted for wheat in breakfast cereals and that the extraction rate should remain at 85 per cent. until 30th June, 1949, unless it were found possible to obtain more wheat from Russia. In order to prevent wheat stocks from falling below nine weeks' supply at 30th June, 1949, and to reduce the risk of deterioration of the large supplies of coarse grains which would accumulate in the United Kingdom up to April 1949, he suggested that the Government should exercise their option to give United Kingdom farmers coarse grains in place of the 20 per cent. of millable wheat of the 1948 harvest which they were expecting to retain.

The Minister of Agriculture, while supporting the proposals with regard to bread rationing and oatmeal and barley products, urged that farmers should be allowed to retain 20 per cent. of the millable wheat of the 1948 harvest and proposed that an additional 150,000 tons of coarse grains should be made available in order to enable the conditions of eligibility for rations for pigs and poultry to be widened.

The Cabinet first discussed the proposal to substitute for bread rationing a system of bulk allocation of flour and to relax the present restrictions on the human consumption of oatmeal and other cereal products. There was general approval of these measures, which should lead to a substantial saving in manpower without any appreciable increase in the consumption of cereals. It was felt, however, that it would be inexpedient to announce the changes in advance of the statement which the Government would have to make on the import programme for 1948–49 as a whole. It was likely that, even with aid from the United States, imports of some commodities would have to be reduced; and there would be confusion and misunderstanding both at home and abroad if an announcement to this effect followed closely on an apparent relaxation of
the restrictions on the consumption of cereals. The import programme would be submitted to the Cabinet within the next week or two and it should be possible to make an announcement by the middle of July.

The Cabinet—

(1) Approved in principle the proposals made by the Minister of Food in paragraph 6 (i) to (iv) and (vi) of C.P. (48) 152; and agreed to consider in connection with their forthcoming review of the import programme for 1948-49 the date on which these proposals should be announced and the form of the announcement.

(2) Agreed that, when a decision on the date and form of the announcement had been taken, advance information of what was proposed should be communicated to the Governments of the United States, Canada and Australia.

The Cabinet then discussed the proposal to offer coarse grains in substitution for the 20 per cent. of millable wheat of the 1948 harvest which farmers were expecting to retain for their own use.

It was pointed out that the adoption of this proposal would ensure that the United Kingdom would not need to buy additional wheat in 1948-49 in order to prevent stocks from falling to a dangerous level and that it would be a convenient method of disposing of the temporary surplus of coarse grains.

On the other hand, it was recalled that farmers had been led to believe that they would be allowed to retain 20 per cent. of their wheat unless there was an acute shortage of wheat for human consumption. It would be necessary to make available 353,000 tons of coarse grains in return for 265,000 of wheat and an additional cost of £2-3 million would be incurred. Moreover, the estimates of the probable stock levels at 30th June, 1949, seemed to have been made on pessimistic assumptions: it should be possible to prevent stocks from falling much below the level of nine weeks' supply even at the critical period at the end of June. At the same time, it was recognised that on defence grounds it would be desirable to maintain substantially higher stocks throughout the year.

The Cabinet—

(3) Agreed that farmers should be allowed to retain 20 per cent. of their millable wheat of the 1948 harvest.

The Cabinet then discussed the proposal that 150,000 tons of coarse grains should be released in the period up to 30th April, 1949, to enable the conditions of eligibility for pig and poultry rations to be widened.

It was explained that the present large stocks would enable the wider basis of rationing to be continued for at least a further year and that, even though no supplies were obtained from the Argentine in 1949, there was good reason to hope that enough could be secured from Russia and Eastern European countries to justify taking the risk of widening the basis of rationing. This step would be particularly valuable in encouraging new producers and it would reduce the risk of deterioration of the supplies of coarse grains in the United Kingdom.

The Cabinet—

(4) Agreed that 150,000 tons of coarse grains should be made available in the period up to 30th April, 1949, to enable the basis of eligibility for pig and poultry rations to be widened.

(5) Agreed that the Production Committee should consider whether still further increases in feeding-stuffs rations could be justified.
3. The Lord Privy Seal said that, in spite of prolonged consultations, the Government representatives in the House of Lords had been unable to persuade the Opposition leaders to modify their attitude towards certain features of the British Nationality Bill, and in the Committee Stage on the previous day the Opposition had carried against the Government two important amendments of the Bill. The first of these changed the term "citizen of the United Kingdom and Colonies" to "British subject of the United Kingdom and Colonies." This was inconsistent with the whole scheme of the Bill, which contemplated that each of the self-governing parts of the Commonwealth would have its own local citizenship, and that the term "British subject or Commonwealth citizen" would be reserved as a general description of all citizens possessing local citizenship of any part of the Commonwealth (save Eire). The second amendment provided that nothing in the Bill "should affect the status by British law of a citizen of Eire in respect of his right to be regarded as a British subject." This amendment was inconsistent with Clause 2 of the Bill, which enabled Eire citizens who were British subjects at the commencement of the Act to retain their status as British subjects only if they made a written application for that purpose on grounds specified in the Clause.

By the first of their amendments the Opposition had undermined the general scheme which had been evolved in agreement with all other Commonwealth Governments save the Government of Eire. And, by their second amendment, they had similarly undermined the separate agreement which had been reached with the Eire Government about the position of Eire citizens who desire to remain British subjects. By carrying these two amendments against the advice of the Government they had done a great disservice to the cause of Commonwealth unity.

The Cabinet—

Agreed that the House of Commons should in due course be advised to reject these two amendments which the House of Lords had made in the British Nationality Bill.

Cabinet Office, S.W. 1,
22nd June, 1948.