CONCLUSIONS of a Meeting of the Cabinet held at 10 Downing Street, S.W. 1, on Monday, 6th December, 1948, at 11 a.m.

Present:
The Right Hon. C. R. Attlee, M.P., Prime Minister (in the Chair).


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.

The Right Hon. A. Woodburn, M.P., Secretary of State for Scotland.

The Right Hon. Aneurin Bevan, M.P., Minister of Health.

The Right Hon. J. H. Wilson, M.P., President of the Board of Trade.

The following were also present:
The Right Hon. John Strachey, M.P., Minister of Food.

The Right Hon. Ernest Bevin, M.P., Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.

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. George Tomlinson, M.P., Minister of Education.

Secretariat:
Sir Norman Brook.
Mr. A. Johnston.
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Parliament.
Foreign Affairs Debate.

1. The Cabinet discussed the arrangements for the debate on Foreign Affairs which was to be held in the House of Commons on 9th and 10th December.

Interest would focus mainly on the problems of Europe. The Foreign Secretary said, however, that he could not avoid making some reference to recent events in China. He did not intend to say anything at this stage which would exclude the possibility of our subsequently establishing friendly relations with any Communist Government which might emerge in China.

The Foreign Secretary would open the debate on 9th December. It was understood that Mr. Churchill intended to speak on 10th December; and it was agreed that the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster should intervene in the debate soon afterwards in order to reply to Opposition criticism of the Government's handling of the current discussions in Paris on the form of the standing arrangements to be made for consultation between the countries of western Europe. The Minister of State or the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs would reply to the debate.

Western Union.

(Previous Reference: C.M. 48/68th Conclusions, Minute 1.)

2. The Foreign Secretary said that, at the meetings of the Committee of Inquiry in Paris, the French representatives were pressing their proposal for a Consultative Assembly for western Europe; and, in view of the publicity which was being given to these discussions, there was perhaps some risk of our being pressed to define prematurely our final attitude towards the proposals there under discussion. It was important that we should not be forced into any exclusive association with France and the Benelux countries: we had also to consider our relations with the other countries of Europe and with Commonwealth countries overseas.

The function of the Committee of Inquiry was to examine all the possible forms of ensuring closer co-operation between the countries of western Europe, and to submit their recommendations to the Consultative Council established under the Treaty of Brussels; and it was important that the preparatory character of the current discussions should not be obscured. The Consultative Council, when they received the report of the Committee of Inquiry, would have to consider whether they should adopt at once some machinery for closer consultation between the Brussels Powers alone or whether they should seek to bring into the scheme a number of other European Powers, including Italy and the Scandinavian countries. The Foreign Secretary said that, as at present advised, he was disposed to advocate the second course. He had particularly in mind the need for devising arrangements which would enable Germany to be associated, in some appropriate manner, with any standing organisation which might be established for the discussion of European problems.

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster said that there was no immediate risk of our being involved in any commitment as a result of the current discussions in Paris. The Committee of Inquiry had appointed a sub-committee to consider in detail the proposals put forward by the representatives of the United Kingdom and France and any alternative proposals that seemed to merit consideration; and this had been arranged without any commitment in principle to either the French or the United Kingdom plan. The report of the Committee of Inquiry could, he thought, take the form of presenting the alternatives for final decision by the Consultative Council; and he hoped it would be possible to avoid disclosing in that document any disagreement between the French and United Kingdom Governments. It was clear that the Committee of Inquiry were not empowered to reach final decisions.

The Cabinet took note of these statements.
Palestine.

(Previous Reference: C.M. (48) 71st
Conclusions, Minute 1.)

3. The Foreign Secretary made a report to the Cabinet on the course of the discussions on Palestine at the United Nations meeting in Paris. After recalling the earlier history of these discussions the Foreign Secretary explained the circumstances in which the latest United Kingdom resolution on the subject had been put forward. This had proved unacceptable to the Arab States, who were still unwilling to acknowledge the partition of Palestine; and they had combined with the Slav and South American groups to ensure its defeat. An amended resolution would come before the Assembly shortly; and if, as seemed likely, it proved impossible to secure a two-thirds majority in its favour, the position would be governed by the Security Council resolution, under which Dr. Bunche would continue to act as mediator.

In discussion it was suggested that, although we might be unable as yet to recognise the Israeli Government, it would be convenient if some practical arrangement could be made for establishing direct communication with that Government. At present, the British Consuls in Haifa and Jerusalem were unable to communicate with the Jewish authorities at Tel Aviv. The establishment of some channel of communication with the Israeli Government would be of practical convenience to several Departments of the United Kingdom Government, and would also help to meet Parliamentary criticism.

There was general agreement that we must continue to oppose any attempt to secure the admission of Israel to the United Nations.

The Cabinet—

Took note of the Foreign Secretary's statement, and invited him to consider whether it would be possible, without formally recognising the Israeli Government, to devise practical means of establishing a channel of communication with that Government.

National Service Bill.

(Previous Reference: C.M. (48) 75th
Conclusions, Minute 3.)

4. The Minister of Defence drew attention to an Opposition amendment to the National Service Bill to the effect that a person should not be called up after attaining the age of 18½ years unless he had applied for deferment. This amendment would have to be resisted, as it would interfere with the proposed method of controlling the intake of National Service men by raising the age of call-up.

In discussion, it was stated that the object of the Opposition, in tabling this amendment, might be to draw from the Government an assurance that young men would be given a clear indication in advance of the date on which they were likely to be called up. The Government could say that they hoped to ensure an interval of three clear months between announcement of registration and call-up; and they could also indicate that arrangements would be made to enable University students to perform their National Service between leaving school and proceeding to the University.

The suggestion was made that the amendment might be out of order as imposing a charge on public funds, since it would have the effect of requiring the Government to call young men up for National Service earlier than they would otherwise have been called up. It was agreed that this point should be explored.

The Cabinet—

Took note of the statement by the Minister of Defence and of the points raised in the discussion.
5. On 2nd December the Cabinet had invited the Lord President's Committee to examine Clause 19 of the Licensing Bill relating to the provision of alcoholic drinks at bottle parties. The Cabinet now had before them a memorandum by the Home Secretary (C.P. (48) 292) reporting the results of this examination and of later discussions with the Lord Chancellor.

The Home Secretary said that this problem was confined to central London. Bottle parties had come into existence there some twenty years ago as a means of evading the licensing law. They were not liable for the heavy licensing fee and the contribution to monopoly value which a licensed house had to pay, and they were not registered clubs. Under a Defence Regulation which would come to an end in 1950, a chief officer of police could make an order closing undesirable premises in certain circumstances, and seventy-three such orders had been made by the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis in respect of bottle parties, including three in the present year; but the Lord Chancellor and he agreed that it was not practicable to deal with this problem by putting these emergency powers on a permanent basis. It would be politically difficult to make any concession in favour of bottle parties; and this difficulty had been increased by statements which had appeared in the newspapers in the last few days to the effect that the Government were proposing to increase the facilities for drinking. He thought it should be left to the occupiers of licensed premises and to registered clubs to make any further use which they might desire of the existing statutory provisions regarding applications for extensions of permitted hours on special occasions. A bottle party which changed its status to that of a registered club would have the same opportunity as existing clubs to apply for such extensions.

The Lord Chancellor regretted that it had been found necessary to interfere with reputable night clubs, where young people found harmless pleasure in dancing. He also thought that, in the interests of the tourist trade, it was unfortunate that the Government should do anything to enhance the impression that London was a dull place compared with other capital cities. He had been attracted by a proposal that there should be a statutory provision under which, in areas specially designated by the Home Secretary (and he need only designate central London), the chief officer of police should be empowered to grant extensions of permitted hours two or three times a week under proper safeguards.

In further discussion it was generally agreed that it was not desirable to amend the Bill in the direction of giving further facilities for drinking after the existing permitted hours. There was no general demand for an extension of facilities of this kind, and any general increase of such facilities might have undesirable social and economic consequences. It might be that the Commissioner of Police could give, on a rather more liberal scale, extensions under the existing statutory provisions relating to special occasions; but no reference should be made to this in the course of the debate.

The Cabinet—
(1) Agreed that Clause 19 of the Licensing Bill relating to bottle parties should remain unaltered.
(2) Invited the Home Secretary to consider at a later stage whether, by administrative means, some extension of permitted hours could be allowed in central London in appropriate cases, subject to suitable safeguards.

Cabinet Office, S.W. 1,
6th December, 1948.