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C.M. (50)

43rd Conclusions

CABINET 43 (50)

CONCLUSIONS of a Meeting of the Cabinet held at 10, Downing Street, S.W.1, on Thursday, 6th July, 1950, at 11 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.

The Right Hon. HUGH DALTON, M.P., Minister of Town and Country Planning.

The Right Hon. VISCOUNT ADDISON, Lord Privy Seal.

The Right Hon. VISCOUNT JOWITT, Lord Chancellor.

The Right Hon. J. CHUTER EDE, M.P., Secretary of State for the Home Department.

The Right Hon. E. SHINWELL, M.P., Minister of Defence.

The Right Hon. G. A. ISAACS, M.P., Minister of Labour and National Service.

The Right Hon. ANEURIN BEVAN, M.P., Minister of Health.

The Right Hon. GEORGE TOMLINSON, M.P., Minister of Education.

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

The Right Hon. JAMES GRIFFITHS, M.P., Secretary of State for the Colonies.

The Right Hon. HECTOR McNEIL, M.P., Secretary of State for Scotland.

The Right Hon. P. C. GORDON-WALKER, M.P., Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations.

The following were also present:

The Right Hon. ALFRED BARNES, M.P., Minister of Transport (*Item 3*).

The Right Hon. MAURICE WEBB, M.P., Minister of Food (*Item 3*).

The Right Hon. R. R. STOKES, M.P., Minister of Works (*Item 3*).

The Hon. K. G. YOUNGER, M.P., Minister of State (*Item 2*).

The Right Hon. SIR HARTLEY SHAW-CROSS, K.C., M.P., Attorney-General (*Item 3*).

The Right Hon. WILLIAM WHITELEY, M.P., Parliamentary Secretary, Treasury (*Item 1*).

Secretariat:

Sir Norman Brook.

Mr. A. Johnston.

CABINET 43 (50)

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Parliament.

Business in the
House of
Commons.

1. The Cabinet were informed of the business to be taken in the House of Commons in the following week.

The Secretary of State for Scotland said that in the Scottish Grand Committee on 11th July there was to be a discussion of the Scottish fishing industry in a Supply debate on the Scottish Estimates. He would be expected to give them some further details of the subsidy which was to be granted to trawler-owners. This subsidy would, however, be available to the English as well as the Scottish sections of the industry, and there might be resentment among English Members if further information about it were given in the first instance to the Scottish Grand Committee. The Cabinet invited the Secretary of State to consult the Lord President on this point, after he had had an opportunity of discussing it further with the Minister of Agriculture and the Chief Whip.

Business in the
House of
Lords.

In the House of Lords the Government's opposition to the *Liberties of the Subject Bill*, introduced by Viscount Samuel, was being exploited as evidence that the Labour Party were no longer champions of individual liberty. *The Lord Chancellor* said that this misrepresentation was likely to gain still further publicity if, in the Committee Stage, the Government brought forward amendments designed to make the particular clauses of the Bill more reasonable and practical. He therefore proposed, after consultation with the Lord Privy Seal, to refrain from proposing Government amendments and to confine himself to criticism of particular clauses, advising the House to reject them in turn but not necessarily pressing his opposition to a division.

The Cabinet took note, with approval, of the procedure which the Government spokesmen proposed to follow in dealing with this Bill. If it passed the Lords before the end of the Session, the Government would not be prepared to give any facilities for its discussion by the House of Commons.

Korea.

(Previous
Reference :
C.M. (50) 42nd
Conclusions,
Minute 3.)

2. *The Prime Minister* said that the Defence Committee had that morning considered the current situation in Korea. In view of the risks to which we were exposed elsewhere in the Far East and South-East Asia, it was not proposed that further United Kingdom forces should be sent to Korea. It was being suggested to the United States Government that immediate steps should be taken to initiate an Anglo-American review of the strategic situation in the Far East and South-East Asia; and the possibilities of enlisting military assistance from Australia and Pakistan were to be urgently explored. It was specially important at the present time that preoccupation with Korea should not divert attention from other danger-spots in these areas; and also that we should not allow the situation in the East generally to blind us to the risks to which we were exposed in Europe.

In the Parliamentary debate on the previous day the House of Commons had given a valuable demonstration of support for the action taken by the United Kingdom Government in response to the resolution of the Security Council. It was gratifying that there had been no disposition to ventilate legal doubts about the validity of the action taken by the United States and Commonwealth Governments in resisting this act of aggression against South Korea.

In the Security Council there was every disposition to avoid fettering the discretion of the United States Commander in the military operations in Korea. Some difficulty was, however, being encountered in devising appropriate procedures for enabling the Security Council to keep in touch with the development of the situation and to appear to be exercising some measure of control over the forces which were operating in the name of, if not formally on behalf of, the United Nations.

The Cabinet—

Took note of these statements.

Industrial Disputes.
Strike of Smithfield Drivers.
 (Previous Reference : C.M. (50) 42nd Conclusions, Minute 7.)

3. The Cabinet had before them a memorandum by the Home Secretary (C.P. (50) 158) recommending, on behalf of the Emergencies Committee, that from 10th July Service labour should be used to obtain meat and general provisions from cold stores, and when necessary from ships, in the London docks, but that Servicemen so employed in the dock area should handle only essential food-stuffs.

The Home Secretary explained that a substantial meat ration was being distributed in London in the present week, but that this would almost exhaust the supplies of meat in the cold stores outside the dock area and it would therefore be necessary from 10th July onwards to use Servicemen to convey meat from cold stores in the dock area. If, as was expected, the dockers refused to deliver meat to cold stores in the dock area where troops were operating, the Servicemen would have to begin about 12th or 13th July to take meat from the ships in the docks. This would probably provoke a dockers' strike: Mr. R. J. Mellish, M.P., who could speak with authority on the attitude of the dockers, had confirmed the view which he had expressed in a supplementary Question on 4th July that, if Servicemen began to work in the dock area, the dockers would feel obliged to come out on strike, although many of the men had no wish to stop work. In present circumstances, however, the Emergencies Committee saw no alternative but to use Service labour to bring essential food-stuffs out of the dock area.

The Minister of Labour said that there was no present indication that the Smithfield drivers would agree to terms which could bring the strike to an early end, though they were holding a further meeting that morning. Meanwhile, there were indications that trouble was being fomented elsewhere. An unofficial meeting of shop-stewards in the road-haulage industry had on the previous evening demanded that all outstanding claims in the industry should be settled within twenty-one days, although in fact there were no such claims outstanding; and there was some danger that the Smithfield dispute might be extended in this fashion to other branches of the road-haulage industry and possibly to passenger transport in London. Some long-term difficulties about the meal times of tug-boatmen had also come to a head: the employers had wished to stop incipient trouble by threatening to dismiss any tug-boatmen who refused to observe the long-standing practice about the taking of meal times and, subject to official views, they were anxious at least to issue a warning that further endeavours to observe fixed meal times, regardless of the state of work, were likely to lead to dismissal.

In discussion the following points were made:—

(a) While it might be unavoidable that Servicemen should be sent to work in the London dock area on 10th July, the repercussions would probably be serious and all alternative courses ought, therefore, to be thoroughly explored in the short time available. It was, in a sense, playing into the hands of Communist agitators to place thousands of dockers, who had no Communist sympathies and were reluctant to come out on strike, in a position in which they felt obliged to stop work. Moreover, the general position over the whole transport service was not sufficiently satisfactory to justify Ministers in ignoring the danger of widespread stoppages: several groups of transport workers had grievances which could be exploited. A situation might arise in which there was more work to be done than the Services could cope with, and an appeal for civilian volunteers might lead to a widespread transport strike.

(b) Before the war it had been common, in unofficial transport strikes against the advice of the union, to ask the union concerned to issue permits authorising loyal members of the union to undertake work which the strikers should have performed. The authority of the Transport and General Workers' Union over its members appeared to be weaker than before the war, but it still seemed desirable to explore with the Union the extent to which resort might be

had to this course. If it were adopted, van-men employed by the Co-operative Societies and the larger retailers could collect meat and other food-stuffs from the cold stores outside and within the dock area. While this might place a strain on the cohesion of the Union, it was unreasonable that the Government should assume the whole responsibility for breaking an unofficial strike which was largely directed against the principal officers of the Union.

(c) Stocks of meat in the London cold stores were low at present because imports fell off in the summer and home-killings were not yet running at a high figure. Those responsible for the Smithfield stoppage had doubtless timed the strike to take advantage of this situation. It was, therefore, desirable that the handling of meat in the London area should be reconsidered with a view to securing, as far as possible, that meat stocks in the cold stores were kept at a sufficiently high level to ensure that at no time of the year could the London meat ration be put in sudden jeopardy by a lightning stoppage.

(d) Was it right that a substantial meat ration should be given in the present week, when the effect would be to deplete the supplies in the cold stores and possibly, by giving a false sense of security, to deprive the Government of the backing of public irritation against the strikers? In reply, it was pointed out that the size of this week's ration had already been announced, and that it was desirable, in order to secure a regular flow of meat supplies, to issue meat to the public as it became available.

(e) It was desirable to examine on a long-term basis the circumstances in which Servicemen were employed in connection with industrial stoppages. The extent to which troops had been used in recent strikes was seriously interfering with Service training. Servicemen should only be employed for the purpose of maintaining supplies and services essential to the life of the community, and it was perhaps arguable whether the maintenance of London's meat supplies came within that definition. As against this, it was pointed out that the Government had assumed responsibility for providing food for the people.

(f) There were signs of a concerted effort by subversive forces to cause as much industrial dislocation as possible at the present time, and it was inexpedient that any unnecessary risks should be taken of widening the area of dispute. The employers of the tug-boatmen should therefore be told that on general grounds it was preferable that they should not issue any warning notice this week.

(g) In view of the possible repercussions in present circumstances of taking criminal proceedings against the instigators of the Smithfield strike, it would be useful if the Meat Transport Organisation were asked to consider whether the employers could not in suitable cases take civil proceedings for damages in respect of breach of contract.

(h) The Distribution and Marketing Committee were examining the future of Smithfield meat market, in the light of the recurrent labour trouble there. Their investigation would, however, be concerned with the long-term problem, and could not influence the present situation. The Minister of Food had made a useful statement, in answer to a written Question on 5th July, to the effect that the dispersal of the Smithfield market was under consideration.

(i) Recent figures showed that the trade unions were making substantial use of the National Arbitration Tribunal. The question whether further machinery was necessary or desirable in order to prevent unofficial stoppages was under discussion between the Minister of Defence and the Minister of Labour.

The Cabinet—

- (1) Invited the Minister of Labour to explore with the Transport and General Workers' Union the extent to which the supply of essential food-stuffs in London could be maintained by the issue to members of the Union of permits authorising them to undertake work which

was not being performed because of the unofficial stoppage at Smithfield, and to report the result of his enquiries to the Emergencies Committee.

- (2) Agreed that, if sufficient supplies of meat and other foods could not be assured by the method contemplated in Conclusion (1) above, the Emergencies Committee should be authorised to employ Servicemen in the London dock area from 10th July for handling essential food-stuffs.
- (3) Invited the Minister of Food to suggest to the Meat Transport Organisation that they should consider the question of taking civil proceedings for damages against the ring-leaders of the unofficial stoppage at Smithfield.
- (4) Invited the Minister of Food to explore the measures which might be taken to ensure that several weeks' stock of meat is kept in London cold stores throughout the year, and to report the result of his investigation to the Emergencies Committee.
- (5) Invited the Minister of Labour to advise the employers of the tug-boatmen that, on general grounds and subject to any special considerations known to the employers, it would be preferable not to issue a warning notice which might precipitate a stoppage in present circumstances.

*Cabinet Office, S.W. 1,
6th July, 1950.*

G.R.

