CONCLUSIONS of a Meeting of the Cabinet held at 10 Downing Street, S.W. 1, on Thursday, 7th December, 1950, at 10 a.m.

Present:
The Right Hon. HERBERT MORRISON, M.P., Lord President of the Council (in the Chair)
The Right Hon. ERNEST BEVIN, M.P., Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.
The Right Hon. HUGH DALTON, M.P., Minister of Town and Country Planning.
The Right Hon. VISCOUNT JOWITT, Lord Chancellor.
The Right Hon. E. SHINWELL, M.P., Minister of Defence.
The Right Hon. ANEURIN BEVAN, M.P., Minister of Health.
The Right Hon. GEORGE T. WILLIAMS, M.P., Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries.
The Right Hon. J. H. WILSON, M.P., President of the Board of Trade.
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. P. J. NOEL-BAKER, M.P., Minister of Fuel and Power (Item 7).
The Right Hon. G. R. STRAUSS, M.P., Minister of Supply (Item 7).
The Right Hon. MAURICE WEBB, M.P., Minister of Food (Items 4–6).
Mr. C. J. SIMMONS, M.P., Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Pensions (Item 3).

The Right Hon. ALFRED BARNES, M.P., Minister of Transport (Item 7).
The Right Hon. EDITH SUMMERSKILL, M.P., Minister of National Insurance (Items 6–7).
The Right Hon. LORD PAKENHAM, Minister of Civil Aviation (Items 8–9).
The Right Hon. JOHN WHEATLEY, K.C., M.P., Lord Advocate (Items 8–9).
Mr. R. J. TAYLOR, Deputy Chief Whip (Items 1–2).

Secretariat:
Sir Norman Brook.
Mr. A. Johnston.
## CABINET 83 (50)

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

The debate on Coal, on 12th December, was to be taken on an Opposition motion, and might have to be treated as an issue of confidence.

The Opposition had accepted, with some reluctance, the suggestion that there should be no further debate on Defence until after Christmas.

It was still hoped that Parliament might be adjourned on 15th December. The Prime Minister would, however, wish to make a statement in the House of Commons on his return from Washington, and the Opposition had asked that there should be an interval of 48 hours before this was debated. If, therefore, the Prime Minister’s return was delayed, it might become necessary for Parliament to meet in the week beginning 18th December.

The Cabinet were informed that difficulty might arise over the Administration of Justice (Pensions) Bill. Two Judges who were to have retired at the end of the year were anxious to benefit by the provisions of the Bill, and it had been suggested that, if the Bill could not be passed before Parliament rose for the Christmas Recess, it should be so amended as to apply to any person who had held office as a Judge at the date of its introduction. In discussion it was suggested that, although such an amendment was unlikely to provoke opposition in the House of Lords, it might well prove unacceptable to Government supporters in the House of Commons, who had no great liking for the Bill. In these circumstances the better course would be to try to accelerate the proceedings on the Bill so that it could be passed into law in its present form before the Christmas Recess.

2. The Minister of Health said that it now seemed likely that the Leasehold Property (Temporary Provisions) Bill would not pass into law before the end of February. Meanwhile, eviction orders continued to be made by the courts against tenants who would have been protected by the provisions of the Bill. Could the courts be asked to take account of the changes which were shortly to be made in the law? Alternatively, would it be proper for him to exercise his requisitioning powers in circumstances in which such action would have the effect of frustrating decisions given by the courts?

The Cabinet—

Invited the Minister of Health to discuss with the Lord Chancellor and the Attorney-General whether any steps could properly be taken to prevent tenants from losing the advantages of the Leasehold Property (Temporary Provisions) Bill during the period while the Bill was under consideration in Parliament.

3. The Cabinet considered a memorandum by the Chancellor of the Exchequer (C.P. (50) 274) reviewing the practice by which civil servants serving with the Armed Forces had in the past received, in addition to their Service pay, the amount by which it fell short of their Civil Service salary.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer said that he had summarised in his memorandum the main arguments for and against this practice, which had been followed in the last three wars. Though these arguments were evenly balanced, he thought it would be difficult in future to justify this discrimination in favour of civil servants, especially now that the rates of Service pay had been so substantially increased. He had therefore come to the conclusion that in any future war civil servants in the Forces should not receive the balance of their civil
pay, but that the system of War Service Grants should be improved on the lines recommended in Appendix I of C.P. (50) 274.

Discussion showed that opinion in the Cabinet was divided on this question.

In favour of the Chancellor's proposal it was argued that, if this system were continued for civil servants, it would have to be applied in future to all persons employed in the public service, including the very large numbers employed in the National Health Service and in the socialised industries. In the past this practice had, in fact, been based largely on a discrimination between salaried staff and wage-earners, which a Labour Government would find it difficult to defend. And, even if the practice were now extended so as to cover all persons employed, in whatever capacity, by a public authority, it would still involve an unjustifiable discrimination between, for example, a steelworker and a worker in the textile industries. Moreover, why should this form of compensation be limited to those who joined the Armed Forces? Was similar compensation to be made available in a future war to persons directed to undertake some form of civil employment less remunerative than their normal occupation?

On the other side it was argued that in this, as in other matters, the Government should follow the lead of the best employers in private industry and commerce: and many of the larger firms had followed the practice of making up the civil pay of employees who joined the Forces in time of war. (As against this it was argued that many of the firms which had followed this practice were firms which enjoyed a monopoly position and were able to pass on the cost to the consumer or the taxpayer.) The Cabinet were informed that the three Service Departments were strongly opposed to the change proposed by the Chancellor of the Exchequer. They considered that it would give rise to discontent in the Forces, and would lead to greater administrative difficulty than the existing system. It would also tend to prejudice recruitment to the Territorial Army and other auxiliary Services. It would probably not be less costly than the existing system. Finally, there was the objection that the alternative of relying on the War Service Grants Scheme involved a personal means test, the administration of which was certain to give rise to Parliamentary difficulties.

The Cabinet were also informed that the new scheme proposed by the Chancellor of the Exchequer was likely to prove unpopular with the police.

The further suggestion was made that, in view of the substantial increases in Service pay, it might well be found in future that a much smaller proportion of people would suffer financial loss through joining the Forces in time of war.

The Minister of Defence said that he would be glad of an opportunity to submit a memorandum on this subject before a final conclusion was reached.

The Cabinet—

Adjourned their consideration of the proposal put forward by the Chancellor of the Exchequer in C.P. (50) 274.

4. The Cabinet had before them a memorandum by the Secretary of State for the Colonies and the Minister of Food (C.P. (50) 289) on the future of the East African groundnut scheme.

The Minister of Food said that the Overseas Food Corporation had now made a careful review of the long-term future of this scheme, and their report was reproduced in Annex I of C.P. (50) 289. The Corporation had reached the conclusion that the large-scale production of groundnuts could not be carried on in East Africa on a
commercial basis, and that there was no hope of obtaining any significant supply of oil-seeds from this scheme. There was no escape from the conclusion that the project, as originally envisaged by the Government, had proved a costly failure. That being so, he had at first been disposed to recommend that the whole project should be abandoned. But a large investment had been made in the scheme, valuable capital assets had been created in East Africa, and useful practical experience in tropical agriculture had been gained. These assets could not be lightly cast aside; and he had therefore discussed with the Secretary of State for the Colonies means of turning them to good account. As a result they now submitted the plan, outlined in the memorandum, for carrying through a limited experiment in agricultural development over a period of seven years.

The Secretary of State for the Colonies said that he was satisfied that, for the reasons given in paragraphs 21–24 of C.P. (50) 289, the wiser course was to use the agricultural assets of the scheme for the purpose of making a contribution to the further development of Tanganyika and providing experience in tropical agriculture which would be of value to the whole Colonial Empire. He was seriously alarmed at the indications that world population was expanding faster than world food production; and he believed that the United Kingdom, as a great Colonial Power, had a special obligation to promote the expansion of food production. From this point of view he thought it would be disastrous if the scheme were entirely abandoned. He recognised, however, that on this conception the responsibility for the scheme must be transferred from the Ministry of Food to his Department. He had considered whether it should be taken over by the Colonial Development Corporation; but he had decided against that course—partly because he thought it unreasonable to expect that the new scheme should pay its way, and partly because the Colonial Development Corporation had enough to do with the fifty projects for which it was already responsible. He therefore proposed that the new scheme should continue to be administered by the Overseas Food Corporation, strengthened by the addition to its board of representatives of the Government of Tanganyika and the Colonial Development Corporation; but that the net cost of the scheme should be carried on the Colonial Office Vote. If the Cabinet should be disposed to favour the abandonment of the scheme, he asked that the Governor of Tanganyika should be given an opportunity to express his views before a final decision was taken.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer said that the original scheme had clearly failed, and the Government must expect political criticism on that account. The volume of that criticism would not be substantially lessened by an announcement that the Government intended to go forward with a limited scheme on the lines recommended in C.P. (50) 289; and he therefore hoped that the Cabinet would consider that scheme on its merits. From his point of view it had the great disadvantage that it contained no assurance that substantial further losses would not be incurred. Indeed, the proposal that the new scheme should not be entrusted to the Colonial Development Corporation was due largely to the fact that it was not expected to pay its way. There was nothing in the memorandum to indicate the scale of the further financial risks involved. Yet, in spite of this financial uncertainty, the Cabinet were asked to give a guarantee that this limited scheme would be continued for at least seven years. Apart from the financial liability, there was also the question whether it was right to devote to East Africa all the technical resources which this scheme involved. Resources of the same kind were urgently required for agricultural development in South-East Asia, under the Colombo Plan; and it was for consideration whether some of those resources should not be diverted to South-East Asia.
In further discussion the following points were made:—

(a) There was general agreement that a final judgment on the possibilities of food production in East Africa could only be based on the results of practical experience of cultivation over a substantial period. The proposal for a seven-year period for the experiment was probably justified. As conditions varied in different parts of Tanganyika, it was also desirable that cultivation should be continued on an experimental basis in several different parts of the territory. On the other hand, it did not follow that the experiment need be on so large a scale as was proposed in C.P. (50) 289. It was the large scale of the proposed operations that made the financial risks so large.

(b) In determining the scale of the continuing experiment, the Overseas Food Corporation had been concerned only with economic considerations. Another possible method of approach was to assess the amount of social capital which had been created under the original scheme in the form of harbours, railways, hospitals, &c, which would have an independent value for the social development of the territory; and to consider what amount of agricultural development would be required in order to warrant the maintenance of that social equipment.

(c) It was also proposed in C.P. (50) 289 that responsibility for the Queensland scheme should now be transferred to the Queensland Government. This scheme had been more successful than the groundnut scheme; and some Ministers were on that account reluctant to agree that it should at this stage be handed over to the Queensland Government. They recognised that it would be inappropriate for the Colonial Office to retain responsibility for the administration of a project located in Australia; but they thought it preferable that the United Kingdom Government should retain some interest in the scheme, possibly through the Commonwealth Relations Office. The Cabinet were informed that the Prime Minister of Queensland would shortly be visiting this country; and it was agreed that there would be advantages in holding preliminary discussions with him, while he was in London, about the future of the Queensland scheme.

The Cabinet—

(1) Invited the Chancellor of the Exchequer to discuss with the Secretary of State for the Colonies and the Minister of Food the financial implications of the proposals in C.P. (50) 289 regarding the future of the East African groundnut scheme; and agreed that the Chairman of the Overseas Food Corporation and the Governor of Tanganyika should be brought into these consultations.

(2) Invited the Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations and the Minister of Food to hold preliminary discussions with the Prime Minister of Queensland regarding the future administration of the Queensland scheme.

(3) Agreed to resume their consideration of the proposals in C.P. (50) 289 in the light of the discussions to be conducted under Conclusions (1) and (2) above.

Food.
Meat Supplies.

(Previous Reference: C.M. (50) 79th Conclusions, Minute 5.)

5. At their meeting on 30th November the Cabinet had authorised the Minister of Food to buy 20,000 tons of meat from the United States.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer said that the price which was being asked for this meat was nearly £300 a ton; and he and the Minister of Food were agreed that it should not be bought at this exhorbitant price. Apart from all other considerations, such a
The purchase would weaken our bargaining position in the current meat negotiations with the Argentine Government. The latest indications were that those negotiations were not making satisfactory progress.

The Cabinet—
Endorsed the views expressed by the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

6. The Cabinet had before them a memorandum by the Minister of Town and Country Planning (C.P. (50) 262) seeking, on behalf of the Committee on Distribution and Marketing, the Cabinet's approval in principle of a scheme to set up a number of public wholesale auction centres for fruit and vegetables on an experimental basis under a public company to be financed by the Exchequer.

The Minister of Town and Country Planning said that his Committee did not suggest that the proposed auctions should be established forthwith, but merely asked for authority to discuss the proposal with the interests concerned so that more detailed plans could be formulated. The experimental auction centres would be established in a number of areas presenting different features, so that adequate experience could be obtained, but there would be a preference for areas where the existing arrangements for the wholesale distribution of fruit and vegetables were unsatisfactory. The auctions might prove to be a valuable means of reducing the retail price of fruit and vegetables, but there were various uncertain elements which would have to be explored in the course of the detailed investigation now proposed. The Committee had favoured the setting up of a public company to organise the auction centres because they felt that a public corporation would be rather an unwieldy instrument, especially in the experimental stages of the scheme.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer said that, as these auction centres would be competing with the existing wholesale trade, the Cabinet must be satisfied that they had a reasonable chance of paying their way; and their financial prospects had not yet been subjected to close scrutiny. He hoped, therefore, that the financial aspects would be closely examined during the next stage of the investigation. The question whether it would be right to set up a public company to organise the auction centres also required further scrutiny, in the light of past experience in the running of public companies financed by the Exchequer.

In discussion there was general agreement that the proposal for a number of experimental wholesale auction centres for fruit and vegetables merited further examination in detail, even though this might involve some public disclosure of what the Government had in mind. Dissatisfaction with the marketing and distribution of vegetables was of long standing, and the establishment of wholesale auctions appeared to offer the most promising prospect of improving the present arrangements.

The Cabinet—
Authorised the Committee on Distribution and Marketing to arrange for preliminary discussions, with the principal interests concerned, about the establishment on an experimental basis of a number of public wholesale auction centres for fruit and vegetables.
7. The Cabinet had before them memoranda by the Minister of Fuel and Power (C.P. (50) 296 and 302) on measures, further to those approved by the Cabinet on 4th December, to meet the shortage of coal in the winter months and in the next coal year.

The Minister of Fuel and Power said that he was anxious that the Departments concerned should investigate the extent to which opencast production could be increased by starting work on some of the sites where agricultural and amenity objections, though serious, were not of overriding importance.

The Minister of Town and Country Planning and the Minister of Agriculture said that they were prepared to co-operate on the lines proposed in C.P. (50) 296, though there were a number of sites to the working of which they would be unable to agree.

The Cabinet—

(1) Invited the Minister of Town and Country Planning and the Minister of Agriculture to co-operate with the Minister of Fuel and Power, as proposed in C.P. (50) 296 and in paragraph 5 of C.P. (50) 302, in increasing the output of opencast coal.

The Minister of Fuel and Power said that, although in his memorandum he had suggested that the Economic Commission for Europe should be warned that coal exports from the United Kingdom in 1951 were not likely to exceed 7 million tons, further discussion with the Ministers concerned led him to recommend that at this stage the Government should not go beyond giving a general warning to the Commission that the restrictions on exports were likely to extend beyond the spring of next year.

In discussion there was general agreement that, as Ministers had not yet had an opportunity of considering the estimated output of coal in 1951, it would be premature to give the Economic Commission an exact estimate of coal exports in that year.

The point was also made that, if shortage of coal seemed likely to result in widespread unemployment and distress in importing countries, there would be pressure for further restriction of consumption in this country, for example, in regard to shop-lighting. While it was true that it had never been suggested that countries producing scarce raw materials should observe the same standard of austerity in their use as might be necessary in importing countries, and while there were considerable restrictions on the use of coal, notably by householders, in this country, it was, nevertheless, true that, in regard to other scarce materials, the United Kingdom Government were using the argument that producing countries should impose restrictions on internal use to make more available for export, and the same argument might be used against us in regard to coal. The general view was, however, that further consideration of restrictions on shop-lighting should be deferred for the time being.

The Cabinet—

(2) Agreed that the Economic Commission for Europe should be warned in general terms that the reduction in the amount of coal available for export from the United Kingdom was likely to extend into the next coal year.

The Minister of Fuel and Power said that he had had urgent representations from the National Coal Board and responsible members of the National Union of Mineworkers that the Board should be allowed to take the initiative in suggesting a scheme of supplementary pensions for miners. Communist elements in the Union were likely to propose a new miners’ charter containing many extravagant claims, and it was important to avoid any suggestion that supplementary pensions had been granted in response to Communist pressure. The National Coal Board were confident that, if they were
given authority to negotiate a supplementary pensions scheme, subject to subsequent approval by the Minister, a reasonable scheme could be worked out at a cost of about 1s. per ton of coal.

In discussion attention was drawn to the substantial addition to the cost of industrial production which would follow from any general adoption of schemes of supplementary pensions. The repercussions were potentially so serious that the Cabinet had agreed that the whole subject should be investigated by a departmental committee, and any general investigation of this kind would be seriously prejudiced if in the meantime a scheme had been introduced for miners. Apart from the cost of these schemes and the effect on home and export prices, the rising average age of the population pointed to the need to investigate afresh the general age of retirement, and any such re-examination would be prejudiced if a pensions scheme for miners had been approved with an early retirement age. No one could be sure how far a scheme of supplementary pensions would succeed in checking the decrease in the labour-force of the mining industry. It was unlikely to be a serious factor in stimulating recruitment, and the prospect of a pension was not likely to influence the younger miners in deciding whether or not to remain in the industry. The value of the scheme would rest mainly in its effect in preventing the older miners from leaving the industry. Such foreign experience as was available suggested that schemes of supplementary pensions for miners did not have much effect in slowing down the tendency for miners to seek more attractive employment elsewhere.

In favour of the introduction of such a scheme, it was argued that the miners' leaders believed that it would help to retain men in the pits, and those Ministers who had experience in the industry were of the same opinion. A higher output of coal was not likely to be secured without some form of increased remuneration for miners, and a scheme of supplementary pensions might stave off demands for higher wages. The standing of the miner in the industrial community had fallen during the last thirty or forty years; and a pensions scheme, particularly if the amounts paid were related to past earnings, would improve the status of the miner in his own opinion and in the eyes of other workers.

Some Ministers thought it would be important to restrict any concession to the mining industry, and suggested that the Trades Union Congress should be asked to assist in inducing other trade unions not to press their demands for supplementary pensions. Doubt was, however, expressed whether it would be possible to hold back the other unions for long. In the gas and electricity industries a substantial percentage of existing workers were already covered by schemes dating from before nationalisation, and the unions concerned would press strongly for the removal of the stand-still on the extension of existing schemes. The same would be true of transport workers, and the steps taken by the Government to prevent an extension of schemes in the railways had already, on more than one occasion, come near to provoking a strike. The view was, however, expressed that, even if there was a considerable extension of supplementary pension schemes in other industries, this would not in itself detract from the value of a scheme for miners.

Concern was expressed about the lack of any detailed information about the scheme which might be adopted for the mining industry. The National Union of Mineworkers were likely to ask for relatively large pensions payable at the age of fifty-five, and the National Coal Board had not worked out a scheme in detail. There was a risk that, in the absence of clear guidance from Ministers, the National Coal Board would be driven to concede a scheme which was expensive and led, by example, to the introduction of expensive schemes in other industries. On the other hand, it would be disastrous if the Board put forward a scheme which was regarded by the miners as inadequate and did nothing to keep men in the industry while imposing a heavy financial burden on the National Coal Board and on the national economy. There was general agreement that any scheme should be contributory in character, and that the pensions
Durham County Council. Conditions of Employment. (Previous Reference: CM. (50) 79th Conclusions, Minute 2.)

Industrial Disputes. Overseas Airways Corporation. should, if possible, be related to earnings. There should, from the outset, be a clear understanding that contributions would not be returned if a miner left the mining industry, and that there could be no question of enabling miners to transfer to other industries which had pension schemes and to take their accrued benefits with them.

There was general agreement that, before a final decision was taken on the introduction of a scheme of supplementary pensions for miners, the position should be discussed with the Trades Union Congress, primarily to ascertain whether it would be practicable to concede a scheme for the mining industry and at the same time maintain, for a time, the standstill imposed by the Government on the introduction of similar schemes in other nationalised industries.

The Cabinet—

(3) Invited the Chancellor of the Exchequer, with the Minister of Fuel and Power, the Minister of National Insurance and a Minister with experience in the mining industry, to discuss with representatives of the General Council of the Trades Union Congress, in the light of the Cabinet’s discussion, the question of introducing a supplementary pensions scheme for miners.

8. The Cabinet had before them a memorandum by the Attorney-General (C.P. (50) 300) on the legal issues arising from the action taken by the Durham County Council with a view to securing that all persons employed by them belonged to a trade union or a professional association.

The Minister of Health said that, in agreement with the Minister of Education, he was proposing to meet representatives of the County Council with a view to bringing the present difficulties to an end.

The Minister of Labour said that in view of the action which was being taken by the Minister of Health he would not, for the time being, notify the County Council in accordance with his usual practice that they were in danger of contravening Order No. 1305.

The Cabinet—

Took note of C.P. (50) 300 and of the statements made by the Ministers of Health and Labour.

9. The Attorney-General drew attention to the strike of electricians employed by British Overseas Airways Corporation, which had arisen through the refusal of electricians to work alongside two electricians who were not members of the Electrical Trades Union. Although this strike was receiving a certain measure of recognition from the union concerned, it was clearly in contravention of Order 1305 and he wished to know whether there were any considerations which the Cabinet would wish him to bear in mind in deciding whether to prosecute the principal members of the Strike Committee. He understood that there was some prospect that the dispute might be settled by 11th December, but he was concerned about the situation which would arise if the strike continued after that time.

The Minister of Civil Aviation said that the British Overseas Airways Corporation were proposing, if the dispute was not settled by 11th December, to take civil proceedings for damages against the strikers.

In discussion the view was expressed that there would be some concern in trade union circles if a dispute arising out of a refusal of
unionists to work alongside non-unionists led to criminal proceedings. At the same time it was recognised that, so long as Order 1305 remained in force, the Attorney-General, could not ignore flagrant breaches of its provisions. It was also felt to be undesirable that both criminal and civil proceedings should be instituted at the same time, and this aspect of the matter might be discussed further with the Chairman of British Overseas Airways Corporation.

The Cabinet—

(1) Invited the Attorney-General to take note of the views which had been expressed in the Cabinet’s discussion.

The attention of the Cabinet was drawn to a strike of employees of Duple Motor Bodies, Ltd., which appeared to contravene Order 1305, although supported by the unions concerned. Workers in a neighbouring factory owned by Park Royal Vehicles, Ltd., were raising contributions to enable strike pay to be distributed to the employees of Duple Motor Bodies, Ltd.

The Cabinet—

(2) Invited the Minister of Labour to submit a memorandum on the industrial dispute at Duple Motor Bodies, Ltd.

Cabinet Office, S.W. 1,
7th December, 1950.