CONCLUSIONS of a Meeting of the Cabinet held at 10 Downing Street, S.W. 1, on Thursday, 29th October, 1953, at 11.45 a.m.

Present:

The Right Hon. Sir WINSTON CHURCHILL, M.P., Prime Minister (in the Chair).
The Right Hon. ANTHONY EDEN, M.P., Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.
The Right Hon. LORD SIMonds, Lord Chancellor.
The Right Hon. VISCOUNT WOOLTON, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister of Materials.
The Right Hon. the EARL ALEXANDER of TUNIS, Minister of Defence.
The Right Hon. JAMES STUART, M.P., Secretary of State for Scotland.
The Right Hon. HAROLD MACMILLAN, M.P., Minister of Housing and Local Government.
The Right Hon. LORD CHERWELL, Paymaster-General.
The Right Hon. FLORENCE HORSBRUGH, M.P., Minister of Education.

The following were also present:
The Right Hon. ANTONY HEAD, M.P., Secretary of State for War (Item 6).
The Right Hon. PATRICK BUCHAN-HEPBURN, M.P., Parliamentary Secretary, Treasury.
Mr. JOHN BOYD-CARPENTER, M.P., Financial Secretary, Treasury.

Secretariat:
The Right Hon. Sir NORMAN BROOK.
Mr. R. M. J. HARRIS.
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The Cabinet.

1. The Prime Minister said that this was the last meeting of the Cabinet which Lord Cherwell would attend before resigning the office of Paymaster-General. He knew that his colleagues would wish to express their appreciation of the valuable counsel which Lord Cherwell had given over the past two years, not merely on scientific questions, but over a wide range of problems with which the Cabinet had had to deal. The Cabinet would be glad to know that, although he was relinquishing his Ministerial responsibilities, Lord Cherwell would continue to make available to the Government his personal advice on scientific questions, particularly those relating to atomic energy.

Parliament.

2. The Cabinet were informed of the business to be taken in the House of Commons in the first week of the new Session. It was hoped that the Debate on the Address would be completed by 10th November.

Regency Bill.

(Previous Reference: C.C. (53) 44th Conclusions, Minute 1.)

3. The Cabinet had before them a memorandum by the Home Secretary (C. (53) 301) covering revised drafts of:

(a) a Bill to amend the Regency Acts;
(b) a Message from the Queen;
(c) Motions for Addresses from each House in reply to the Message.

The Home Secretary said that he had now taken the Queen's pleasure on the point which had been left open at the Cabinet's meeting on 6th July. It was the Queen's wish that, in the event of her incapacity, the Duke of Edinburgh should become and remain Regent unless there were a child or grandchild of theirs who had attained the age of eighteen and could, therefore, be Regent in the Duke's place. The Queen's wish was met by Clause 1(2) of the revised draft Bill.

The time-table which he had in mind for proceeding with the Bill was as follows. On 4th November the Royal Message would be delivered and Addresses would be moved in reply. The Bill would be introduced on 5th November, and he hoped that all its stages could be taken in the House of Commons on 11th or 12th November. If necessary, however, the Committee and remaining stages could be deferred until 16th November. The Bill should therefore reach the House of Lords not later than 16th November.

Other Commonwealth Governments should receive at least 48 hours' notice of the delivery of the Royal Message. As soon, therefore, as the draft Message had been approved by the Queen it should be telegraphed to other Commonwealth Governments, who should also be informed of the statement which would be made by the Government spokesman in the House of Commons when moving the Motion for an Address. He suggested that this statement should take the following form:

"I am sure that it will be the desire of the House that effect should be given to Her Majesty's wishes, and I propose to present a Bill to-morrow for the purpose. It will be made available to Members later in the week. I might add that Her Majesty's wishes have been considered by the Commonwealth Prime Ministers concerned who have all agreed with the proposal that effect should be given to them."

The Prime Minister said that Opposition Leaders in the House of Commons should be informed in advance of the change made in the Bill since they had last been consulted.
The Cabinet—

(1) Approved the draft Bill, draft Royal Message and draft Motions for Addresses attached to C. (53) 301.
(2) Took note that the Home Secretary would submit the draft Royal Message for the Queen's approval.
(3) Approved the timetable proposed by the Home Secretary for proceeding with the Bill.
(4) Invited the Home Secretary to inform Opposition Leaders of the change made in the Bill since they had last been consulted on the matter.
(5) Invited the Lord Privy Seal to telegraph to other Commonwealth Prime Ministers concerned the text of the Royal Message, as approved by the Queen, and the statement to be made by the Government spokesman when submitting the Motion for an Address in reply.

4. The Prime Minister said that the arrest and detention without charge of the leaders of the People's Progressive Party (P.P.P.) in British Guiana was a serious step and the Cabinet ought to be made aware of the grounds on which it had been thought to be justified.

The Colonial Secretary said that the authorities in British Guiana were faced with a dilemma. If they made no arrests until violence or bloodshed had occurred, they would be accused of weakness and would share some of the responsibility for the consequent suffering and disorder. If, however, arrests were made to forestall serious trouble, as had been done, it could be said that the arrests had not been justified. The Governor was entitled to make such arrests under the emergency powers which had been conferred on him by Order-in-Council and it would be a mistake to deprive him of all discretion in the exercise of his function of preserving law and order. He had urged the Governor to take steps to restrain the leaders of the P.P.P. short of arresting them but, when the Governor had informed him that these leaders were organising illegal meetings and otherwise obstructing the Governor's efforts to restore normal conditions in the Colony, he had authorised him to make the arrests. As a result of intimidation, witnesses required by the prosecution were not coming forward but he had urged the Governor to take all possible administrative means to bring the P.P.P. leaders to trial.

The Lord Chancellor said that, while the Governor could not reasonably be criticised for exercising his emergency powers in the way he had, there was clearly a limit to the period for which persons could reasonably be held under such powers without being brought to trial.

The Colonial Secretary said that he would be glad to know whether his colleagues shared his view that it would be right for him to grant an interview to the former Prime Minister of British Guiana during his visit to this country. He would, of course, confine himself to listening to what Dr. Jagan had to say to him.

It was the general view of the Cabinet that the Colonial Secretary would be well advised to accord interviews both to the representatives of the P.P.P. now in London and also to the representatives of the Opposition Parties in British Guiana.

The Cabinet—

(1) Took note of the Colonial Secretary's statement.
(2) Agreed that the Colonial Secretary should grant interviews to the visiting representatives of the People's Progressive Party and of the Opposition Parties in British Guiana.
5. The Foreign Secretary said that the Jordan Government had invited us to send a squadron of an armoured regiment to Ma'an which lay some 100 miles to the north-east of Akaba. The squadron would enter Jordan via the Port of Akaba and would have no reason to approach the Jordan-Israel frontier. Its arrival in Jordan should not, therefore, attract undue publicity or increase the existing tension between Israel and Jordan. Indeed, it might have a stabilising effect by reassuring the Jordan Government of our fidelity to our obligations to them.

The fact that the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean, had chosen this moment to pay a visit to Amman was, in his view, more likely to be regarded as provocative by the Israel Government but it appeared to be too late to prevent this visit.

The Cabinet—
(1) Agreed that, at a time to be determined by the Foreign Secretary, a squadron of an armoured regiment should proceed to Ma'an in response to the invitation of the Jordan Government.
(2) Invited the Foreign Secretary to inform the Prime Minister of the circumstances in which the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean, was visiting Amman.

6. The Cabinet had before them a memorandum by the Secretary of State for War (C. (53) 258) on the future of the Home Guard.

The Secretary of State for War said that the time was approaching when those who had joined the Home Guard when it was first re-established would have to decide whether to extend their two-year period of service or be discharged, and it was therefore necessary for the Government to decide their future policy. It might perhaps seem anomalous to maintain the Home Guard at a cost of £1,000,000 a year at a time when substantial reductions might have to be made in the size of the Army. On the other hand, the Commander-in-Chief Designate, United Kingdom Land Forces, attached considerable importance to the maintenance of the framework of the Home Guard and it was also necessary to bear in mind the statements which Government spokesmen had made in defending the Home Guard against Opposition attempts to have it disbanded. Indeed, the issue had become in part a political one. If it should be decided to retain the Home Guard, the case for doing so must be effectively presented if recruiting was to be maintained.

The Minister of Defence said that the future of the Home Guard ought properly to be considered as part of the current review of defence expenditure generally. He had no doubt, however, that there was a good case for retaining in peacetime the nucleus of an organisation which in atomic war might well have an invaluable part to play, particularly in assisting the civil defence services.

The Secretary of State for Scotland hoped that any announce-ment about the future of the Home Guard would include some reference to the part which it might play in assisting the civil defence services in war.

The Prime Minister said that it was clearly the view of the Cabinet that the Home Guard should be retained. The decision to retain it should be announced boldly.

The Cabinet—
Authorised the Secretary of State for War to announce that it was the Government’s intention that the Home Guard should continue in being.
7. The Prime Minister said that, in accordance with the Cabinet's decision of 27th October, two informal meetings of Ministers had been held to discuss the proposals for the future marketing of meat and bacon which had been outlined by the Minister of Food in C. (53) 298 and to consider how these could be presented to the farmers' representatives and to Government supporters. These meetings had served to clarify some of the doubts expressed in the Cabinet's earlier discussion. In particular, it had been established that a system of buttress prices would not be inconsistent with the provision for minimum prices under section 5 of the Agriculture Act, 1947, though it would be necessary that in the first two years of the new scheme the buttress prices should not be lower than the minimum prices already declared for those years. In presenting this plan to the farmers and to Government supporters Ministers would have to make it plain that it did not imply any weakening of their support for the principle of producers' Marketing Boards; and on this account it was now proposed that the announcement of these arrangements for meat marketing should be accompanied by a declaration that the Milk Marketing Boards would resume operations in 1954 over the whole range of milk products including liquid milk.

The Prime Minister said that the plan now proposed was outlined in a draft memorandum (C. (53) 302) which had been prepared by officials of the Departments concerned in the light of the discussions at the two informal meetings of Ministers to which he had referred. The choice before the Cabinet was whether, despite the political risks, they should go forward with this plan, which was consistent with their general policy of relaxing Government controls and freeing the economy, or whether they should continue State trading and delay the dismantling of the Ministry of Food while a public enquiry was made into the whole problem of meat marketing.

Discussion showed that there was general support in the Cabinet for the proposal to go forward with a plan on the general lines indicated in C. (53) 302.

The following points were raised in discussion of this plan:

(a) It was suggested that, as a matter of presentation, the new price proposals should not be described as a "deficiency payments" system. The principle of deficiency payments was unpopular with the farmers' representatives and with Government supporters. And this description also tended to obscure the new and important feature of buttress prices. The plan was in fact a dual-price system providing both collective and individual guarantees. Some short title should be devised which would bring out the true nature of the plan.

(b) The Minister of Agriculture said that, if he was to refer to the possibility that a producers' Marketing Board might eventually be established with wide powers of trading in meat, he would wish to do so in more encouraging terms than those used in the last part of paragraph 16 of C. (53) 302. He would like to invite the farmers' representatives to formulate proposals for a Meat Marketing Board with wider functions, and to promise them his assistance in working out such proposals.

The point was made that there were limits to the extent to which the Minister could properly assist one of the interested parties in working out proposals for a marketing scheme which, at a later stage, would require his Ministerial approval. It was his duty to consider, not only the interests of the producers, but also those of other parties affected by a marketing scheme, and at some stages of the procedure he had a semi-judicial function to discharge. It was, however, agreed that this consideration need not preclude the Minister from encouraging producers to formulate proposals for marketing schemes, since it was the declared policy of the Government that Marketing Boards should be established in appropriate cases.

In further discussion it was suggested that the invitation to the farmers' representatives to formulate proposals for a Meat Marketing
Board could be given in more encouraging terms if it were made before, instead of after, the reference to the establishment of a Board which would develop the voluntary marketing of fatstock and exercise compulsory powers in respect of pigs sold for bacon curing.

This part of the statement should also be amended so as to make it clear whether the Board which would exercise compulsory powers in respect of bacon and pigs would also operate, on a voluntary or a compulsory basis, in respect of other livestock.

(c) The Minister of Agriculture suggested that further consideration should be given to the method of exercising Government control over the fixing of prices by Milk Marketing Boards. In his view this should be secured by directions given by the Agriculture Ministers under the Agricultural Marketing Acts, even if it were necessary to amend the Acts for that purpose. He thought it preferable that this control should be exercised under these permanent Acts and not under temporary powers available to the Minister of Food under the Defence Regulations. This might affect the wording of paragraph 20 of C. (53) 302.

The Minister of Education said that, if the Milk Marketing Boards were to operate the Welfare Milk Scheme, it might be desirable that they should also assume responsibility for the School Milk Service.

The Cabinet—

(1) Approved in principle the proposals outlined in C. (53) 302 on the future marketing of meat and bacon and on the future operation of the Milk Marketing Boards.

(2) Invited the Agriculture Ministers and the Minister of Food to consider further the particular points noted in paragraphs (a)-(c) above.

(3) Asked the Lord Privy Seal, in consultation with the Agriculture Ministers, the Minister of Food, the Minister of Housing and the Chief Whip, to draw up a detailed programme and time-table for presenting these proposals to Parliament after preliminary consultation with Government supporters in the House of Commons and with representatives of the farmers and the food trades concerned; and invited him to submit this programme and time-table for the Prime Minister’s approval.