CONCLUSIONS of a Meeting of the Cabinet held at 10 Downing Street, S.W. 1, on Wednesday, 24th February, 1954, at 11.00 a.m.

Present:

The Right Hon. Sir WINSTON CHURCHILL, M.P., Prime Minister.
The Right Hon. ANTHONY EDEN, M.P., Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs (Items 8–13).
The Right Hon. LORD SIMMONDS, Lord Chancellor.
The Right Hon. R. A. BUTLER, M.P., Chancellor of the Exchequer.
The Right Hon. VISCOUNT SWINTON, Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations.
The Right Hon. JAMES STUART, M.P., Secretary of State for Scotland.
The Right Hon. PETER THORNEYCROFT, M.P., President of the Board of Trade.
The Right Hon. FLORENCE HORSBRUGH, M.P., Minister of Education.

The Most Hon. THE MARQUESS OF SALISBURY, Lord President of the Council.
The Right Hon. Sir DAVID MAXWELL Fyffe, Q.C., M.P., Secretary of State for the Home Department and Minister for Welsh Affairs.
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. OLIVER LYTTELTON, M.P., Secretary of State for the Colonies.
The Right Hon. Sir WALTER MONCKTON, Q.C., M.P., Minister of Labour and National Service.
The Right Hon. Sir THOMAS DUGDALE, M.P., Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries.
The Right Hon. GWILYM LLOYD-GEORGE, M.P., Minister of Food.

The following were also present:
The Right Hon. LORillard de L’IsLE and DUDLEY, Secretary of State for Air (Items 5–6).
The Right Hon. OSBERT PEAKE, M.P., Minister of Pensions and National Insurance (Item 5).

The Right Hon. ANTHONY HEAD, M.P., Secretary of State for War (Items 5–6).
The Right Hon. A. T. LENNOX-BOYD, M.P., Minister of Transport and Civil Aviation (Item 7).
The Right Hon. Sir DAVID ECCLES, M.P., Minister of Works (Item 8).

The Right Hon. PATRICK BUCHAN-Hepburn, M.P., Parliamentary Secretary, Treasury (Items 1–5).

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

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Parliament.

1. The Cabinet were informed of the business to be taken in the House of Commons in the following week. The debate on the Defence White Paper would be held on 2nd March and would be opened by the Prime Minister.

Television Development.

(Previous Reference: C.C. 53) 79th Conclusions, Minute 2.)

2. The Lord Privy Seal said that leaders of the two Opposition Parties in the House of Commons had indicated that they would welcome an opportunity for private consultation with the Government in the hope that agreement might be reached on proposals for providing a competitive television service which could be passed through Parliament without controversy between the Parties. He and some of his colleagues had therefore held a private meeting earlier in the week with representatives of the Opposition Parties. It had emerged from this meeting that they would be willing to accept a solution by which an alternative television programme was provided by a second public corporation, to be financed eventually by an increase in the television licence fee; but they assumed that in the initial development period the Exchequer would provide the bulk of the money required. There had also been some discussion about the means of controlling the treatment of religion and politics in the competitive television programmes.

The Lord Privy Seal recalled that Ministers had already considered the possibility of providing a competitive television service by the methods now favoured by the Opposition Parties, and had satisfied themselves that a plan on those lines was impracticable. It was clear that there was no prospect of reaching agreement between the Parties on this basis. Subject therefore to the Cabinet’s views, he proposed to inform the leaders of the Opposition Parties that the Government adhered to their view that a competitive television service must be free to derive the bulk of its revenue from advertisements. There would be no difficulty in reaching agreement between the Parties on the subsidiary question of control over the treatment of religion and politics in the competitive television programmes, and this might be the subject of continuing consultations.

The Cabinet—

Endorsed the views expressed by the Lord Privy Seal and authorised him to inform the leaders of the Opposition Parties in the House of Commons that the proposals which they had put forward provided no basis for an agreement between the Parties on the means for providing a competitive television service.

Raw Materials.

Tungsten.

3. The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster said that he had come to the conclusion that State trading in tungsten could be brought to an end on 1st April. An announcement to this effect would be made in the House of Commons in the following week. This would end State trading in materials, with the sole exception of jute.

The Cabinet—

Took note, with approval, of this statement by the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster.
4. The Prime Minister said that he was doubtful whether it would be possible to proceed with the Teachers' Superannuation Bill, in view of the continuing opposition to it among Government supporters.

In discussion it was pointed out that on the merits there was a strong case for the proposals in the Bill. They had the support of the local education authorities and of many of the more responsible newspapers; and the Executive of the National Union of Teachers certainly assumed that the Government would persist with the Bill. If they did not do so, they would give offence to a number of other Government supporters who were defending the principles of the Bill.

The Cabinet recognised, however, that in view of the division of opinion among Government supporters it would not be expedient to attempt to obtain a Second Reading of the Bill at the present time.

The Cabinet—
Invited the Chancellor of the Exchequer to discuss with some of his colleagues the best Parliamentary tactics for handling this situation, and to report their recommendations to the Prime Minister.

5. The Cabinet gave preliminary consideration to a memorandum by the Chancellor of the Exchequer (C. (54) 69) indicating that, in view of the decision to increase Service pay, he would now be prepared to grant a 10 per cent. increase to those Service officers whose retired pay had been stabilised in 1935 at a rate 9\% per cent. below that ruling in 1919, and to make a similar increase to retired civil servants whose pensions had been similarly stabilised in 1935. Annexed to the memorandum was a draft White Paper explaining the reasons for making these concessions.

In this discussion the following points were made:

(a) The Minister of Pensions and National Insurance said that, before it was decided to make these concessions, he would be glad of an opportunity to discuss with the Chancellor of the Exchequer one or two other concessions to disabled ex-Servicemen who merited special consideration. The major issues of pensions and national insurance were at present the subject of enquiry by a Committee under the Chairmanship of Sir Thomas Phillips, but this Committee would not present its report until the end of the year.

(b) The Commonwealth Secretary said that the concession proposed for civil servants should extend to such former members of the Indian Civil Service as had suffered a similar reduction of pension in 1935.

The Prime Minister said that he would be announcing the increases in Service pay in the course of his speech in the Defence debate on 2nd March, and he would have to say something then about the concession now proposed for these retired Service officers. The Cabinet had had little time to consider the terms of the draft White Paper, and he suggested that the matter should be raised again at the Cabinet's meeting on 26th February. In the meantime the Chancellor of the Exchequer could discuss any particular points with the Minister of Pensions and National Insurance.

The Cabinet—
Agreed to resume their discussion of this question at their meeting on 26th February.
6. The Cabinet had before them a memorandum by the Home Secretary and the Minister of Defence (C. (54) 67) outlining a scheme for giving civil defence training to selected National Service reservists during their reserve liability for part-time service.

The Home Secretary said that examination had shown that it would not be practicable to give all National Servicemen some civil defence training as part of their colour service. He was therefore recommending, in agreement with the Minister of Defence, that selected National Service reservists who would not be needed in their particular Service during the first twelve months of a war should receive two weeks' civil defence training in each of two consecutive years of their reserve liability. In present circumstances nearly all the National Service reservists so trained would be Royal Air Force reservists. If war came, these reservists would be called up in their own Service, organised in operational units, and placed at the disposal of the Government for civil defence duties. He estimated that about 15,000 men could be made available for training in the first year of the scheme, and about 30,000 in each subsequent year. These men would be used for manning mobile columns, which would be centrally controlled. The Government had already been criticised for their failure to make any significant progress in building up these mobile columns; and he hoped that, if the Cabinet approved the scheme, some reference could be made to it in the forthcoming Defence debate in the House of Commons. The scheme would require legislation, but this would be neither long nor controversial.

In discussion the following points were made:

(a) The capital expenditure required would be about £70,000 in the first year and £130,000 in the second year. There would be additional current expenditure of about £425,000 in the first year, rising to about £850,000 in the second and subsequent years. This cost, both in peace and war, would be borne by the Departments responsible for Civil Defence, though it might be found convenient that some of it should be borne by the Service Departments initially and recovered thereafter.

(b) Any reference made to the scheme in the Defence debate could include a statement that the necessary legislation was being prepared; but, in view of the congestion of the legislative programme, no promise should be made about the date of its introduction.

The Cabinet—

(1) Approved the scheme outlined in C. (54) 67 for training certain National Service reservists in civil defence duties.

(2) Authorised the preparation of the necessary legislation for this purpose and the initiation of preparatory administrative action.

(3) Took note that the Home Secretary and the Minister of Defence would suggest to the Prime Minister the terms in which he might refer to this scheme in the forthcoming Defence debate in the House of Commons.

7. The Cabinet had before them a memorandum by the President of the Board of Trade and the First Lord of the Admiralty (C. (54) 70) on the tactics for negotiating with the United States Government and the Paris Group the question of the export of shipping to the Soviet bloc.

The President of the Board of Trade said that he and the First Lord of the Admiralty agreed that, in the context of the approach to be made to the United States Government on the general policy of East/West Trade, we should suggest that ships with a trial speed in excess of 15 knots should be subject to full embargo and that ships
not subject to embargo should be free from any form of quantitative control. This would be consistent with the proposals we intended to make on all other types of goods for export to the Soviet bloc. In the meantime, however, the control over the export of ships would have to be discussed in the Paris Group on the basis of existing criteria and without waiting for the results of our general approach to the Americans. Unless we made progress on this we should be in danger of losing valuable Russian orders for ships.

The First Lord of the Admiralty said that talks between United Kingdom and United States officials had already been held within the limits of the existing policy. Agreement had been reached that an export quota of 40 fishing vessels a year should be allowed. On merchant ships the United Kingdom representatives had suggested that a global quota of about 150,000 to 200,000 gross tons of shipping a year should be allowed, while the Americans wished to limit this quota to 68,000 gross tons. These questions would now be submitted to the Paris Group. Pending the outcome of the Paris discussions he thought we should hold ourselves free to accept orders for shipping from United Kingdom sources up to a total of 30,000 gross tons in any one year, which was less than half the global figure suggested by the Americans. Unless we could obtain Russian orders for shipping there was danger of unemployment in the smaller shipyards during this year and prospects in the larger shipyards after 1955 were not promising.

The Cabinet—

(1) Agreed that in our general approach to the United States Government on a new policy for East/West Trade we should suggest that ships with a trial speed in excess of 15 knots should be subject to full embargo and that ships not subject to embargo should be freed from any form of quantitative control.

(2) Authorised the United Kingdom representative on the Paris Group to recommend a global annual quota of about 150,000 to 200,000 gross tons of shipping of the types not subject to embargo.

(3) Pending the outcome of the discussions in the Paris Group, authorised the acceptance of orders for the export of ships from the United Kingdom to the Soviet bloc up to a total of 30,000 gross tons in any one year.

Royal Tour.
(Previous Reference: C.C. (54) 10th Conclusions, Minute 6.) Gibraltar.

8. The Prime Minister drew attention to a public statement by the Governor of Gibraltar about the arrangements which he was proposing to make for the visit of Her Majesty and the Duke of Edinburgh to Gibraltar. This was premature and, in certain respects, unfortunate. In view of the agitation which had been worked up in Spain on the subject of The Queen's visit, careful thought would have to be given to the extent to which Spaniards should be admitted to Gibraltar during the visit; and it was unfortunate that the Governor should have committed himself to the view that the frontier should not be closed during that time. The Colonial Secretary had therefore invited the Governor to come to London in the near future for consultations on this subject.

The Cabinet—

(1) Took note that the Governor of Gibraltar had been invited to come to London for consultations on the measures to be taken to ensure the safety of Her Majesty and the Duke of Edinburgh during their visit to Gibraltar.
The Cabinet considered a memorandum by the Minister of Works (C. (54) 73) regarding the arrangements for welcoming Her Majesty and the Duke of Edinburgh on their return to London on 15th May.

The Minister of Works said that, since his memorandum was circulated, he had ascertained that a good deal of ceremony and display was being arranged. Thus, the Lord Mayor and the Corporation of the City of London were proposing to go in state to welcome Her Majesty in the Pool of London; and the bridges immediately above the Pool were to be decorated. It seemed, therefore, that the main problem would be one of co-ordinating the scale of decoration planned by the various authorities concerned. He still considered, however, that the Government should make themselves responsible for the decorations suggested in paragraph 4 of C. (54) 73, at an estimated cost of about £25,000.

In discussion there was general agreement that a suitable amount of decoration should be provided on Her Majesty's return. The point was also made that the national rejoicing would not be confined to London, and it would be appropriate that Her Majesty's return should be signalled by bonfires and beacons throughout the country.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer said that he would wish to discuss the detailed proposals with the Minister of Works. He hoped that the Government expenditure involved could be met within the Minister's Estimate for 1954.

The Prime Minister said that, in a Question to be asked by Mr. Summers on 4th March, it was suggested that church-bells should be rung throughout the country at the moment of Her Majesty's return to this country. This suggestion was welcomed by the Cabinet.

The Cabinet—

(2) Agreed in principle that the Minister of Works should arrange for decorations to be displayed in London, on an appropriate scale, to celebrate the return of The Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh on 15th May.

(3) Invited the Minister of Works to discuss the details of his proposals with the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

(4) Invited the Lord President to consult the appropriate ecclesiastical authorities on the suggestion that church-bells should be rung throughout the country to celebrate The Queen's return.

9. The Cabinet again considered the Home Secretary's memoranda (C. (53) 317 and C. (54) 41) on the recommendations made in the report of the Royal Commission on Betting, Lotteries and Gaming.

The Home Secretary said that it had been suggested to him that it would help the Government to assess the state of public opinion on this question if a debate on the Commission's report were held in the House of Lords. He had therefore circulated a further memorandum (C. (54) 68) outlining the sort of statement which might be made on behalf of the Government in such a debate. This made it clear that detailed consideration of the Commission's proposals would serve no purpose unless it were evident that there was a large measure of agreement on the need for amendment of the existing law and for some form of legal facility for cash betting off the course subject to a strict system of control. The statement would conclude with a promise that, if there was a general feeling among responsible people that the law should be amended and if all political Parties were willing to co-operate in finding a solution, the Government
would be ready to consider whether it would be possible to work out a scheme on the lines recommended by the Commission which would be generally acceptable and might form the basis for legislation when opportunity offered.

In discussion it was agreed that it would be valuable to test the state of public feeling on this question by the means proposed by the Home Secretary. It should be kept in mind, however, that an obstinate and vocal opposition to the Commission’s proposals might well develop, and Government spokesmen should therefore be careful to avoid committing the Government in any way until it could be judged whether the controversy which such legislation was bound to evoke could be kept within reasonable bounds. The sole object of the proposed debate, and of the statement to be made in it on the Government’s behalf, was to put Ministers in a better position to judge whether it would be practicable to proceed with legislation on this subject.

On the form of the draft statement annexed to C. (54) 68, it was suggested that it would be preferable to omit the specific reference to corruption in the Leeds police force. This might provoke the criticism that the Government were founding too much upon the experience of a single city. It might be better to substitute a more general reference to the evidence given to the Royal Commission pointing to laxity and corruption in the enforcement of the existing law.

The Cabinet—

(1) Agreed that, if a debate could be arranged in the House of Lords on the recommendations of the Royal Commission on Betting, Lotteries and Gaming, a statement might be made in the debate on behalf of the Government on the lines of the draft annexed to C. (54) 68, subject to amendment of the reference to corruption among the police.

(2) Authorised the Home Secretary to discuss his proposals with leaders of the Opposition Parties.

(3) Invited the Lord President, if the outcome of the consultations to be held under Conclusion (2) above were satisfactory, to arrange for a debate to be held on this subject in the House of Lords.

10. The Cabinet had before them a memorandum by the Lord Privy Seal (C. (54) 63) about the recommendations in the Report of the Select Committee of the House of Commons on Delegated Legislation (House of Commons Paper No. 310).

The Lord Privy Seal suggested that the Cabinet need concern themselves only with Recommendation (1) of the Select Committee, namely, that debate on “prayers” should regularly cease at 11:30 p.m., at which hour Mr. Speaker would either put the question or, where this appeared to be justified on certain specified grounds, adjourn the debate until 10 p.m. on the next ordinary sitting day of the House (other than a Friday) when it would again be subject to a similar procedure. The Select Committee had preferred this means of avoiding protracted debates on “prayers” to a proposal, which he had put forward in his evidence, that they should be referred for consideration to a Committee of the House. Opposition opinion was understood to be generally in favour of trying the Select Committee’s plan and, although some Government supporters were known to be opposed to it, the Committee of Ministers under his chairmanship which had considered the Select Committee’s recommendations had agreed to advise the Cabinet to adopt it on an experimental basis during the remainder of the present Session. It would clearly be for
the convenience of all Members that prolonged and late debates on "prayers" should be avoided, and the proposed arrangement seemed likely to secure this object without seriously reducing the degree of control exercised by the House over delegated legislation. If there seemed to be some risk that the proposed arrangement would prevent adequate debate on an important "prayer" through the expiry of the statutory period of 40 days, either debate could be begun before 10 p.m. or the Sessional Order embodying the proposed new arrangement could be suspended. If his colleagues agreed, he would now proceed with the necessary further soundings in the House and would thereafter table the draft of a Sessional Order.

The Cabinet—

Approved the proposals in C. (54) 63 for dealing with the recommendations in the Report of the Select Committee of the House of Commons on Delegated Legislation, and invited the Lord Privy Seal to take the necessary steps to put them into effect.

Visiting Forces Act, 1952.

11. The Cabinet had before them a memorandum by the Home Secretary and the Minister of State (C. (54) 55) recommending immediate action to bring into operation the Visiting Forces Act, 1952.

The Home Secretary explained that the purpose of this Act was to enable Her Majesty's Government to ratify and give effect to the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (N.A.T.O.) Status of Forces Agreement (Cmd. 8279 of 1951) which defined the privileges and immunities which each Member of the Organisation would give within its own territory to the armed forces of another Member. An undertaking had been given in the House of Commons that the Act would not be applied to foreign countries unless the Government were satisfied that they were able to accord reciprocal privileges. The position in this respect was now such that he could recommend to the Cabinet that the Act should be brought into effect and applied simultaneously to the United States and to the other N.A.T.O. countries that had ratified the Status of Forces Agreement. He must warn his colleagues, however, that the Order-in-Council which would be necessary under Section 8 of the Act would require approval by affirmative resolution of each House and might give rise to some controversy in Parliament.

The Foreign Secretary said that he fully shared the Home Secretary's desire to bring this Act into effect without further delay. One of its effects would be to deprive members of the United States forces of the immunity from the processes of our criminal law which they now continued to enjoy under war-time enactments. He was under constant pressure to terminate this immunity and the United States Government were willing that it should be replaced by the modified arrangements for which the N.A.T.O. Agreement provided.

The Cabinet—

(1) Subject to Conclusion (2), authorised the Home Secretary to take forthwith the necessary action by Orders-in-Council to bring into operation the Visiting Forces Act, 1952.

(2) Invited the Home Secretary to submit to the Legislation Committee the draft of the Order-in-Council to be made under Section 8 of the Act before it was laid before Parliament.
The Cabinet considered memoranda by the Home Secretary and the Secretary of State for Scotland (C. (54) 60 and 61) on the question whether a Royal Commission should be appointed to review the existing law relating to prostitution and homosexuality.

The Home Secretary said that since 1938 there had been a substantial increase in the number of convictions of prostitutes for soliciting, particularly in London, and he was satisfied that nothing more could be done to remedy the situation until the law had been strengthened—particularly by increasing the penalty and by modifying the requirement to prove "annoyance." But legislation to strengthen the law would be contested, especially by women's organisations, and he could not advise the Government to attempt it unless it was supported by the findings of an authoritative enquiry. There had been an even greater increase in homosexual offences; and, although he himself doubted the expediency of amending the existing law on this subject, it must be recognised that many responsible people believed that homosexual practices between adult males should not constitute a criminal offence. In the present state of public opinion, there would certainly be criticism if an enquiry were held into prostitution and no similar investigation were made into homosexuality. On balance, therefore, he was inclined to recommend that a Royal Commission should be appointed to consider both these problems.

In discussion the following points were made:

(a) It was recognised that the amount of soliciting by prostitutes in some parts of central London was deplorable—and probably without parallel in the capital cities of other civilised countries. It was highly desirable that this situation should be remedied: it gave increasing offence to respectable citizens and to foreign visitors. It was significant that in Scotland, where heavier penalties were available, the number of convictions for soliciting had decreased since 1938.

(b) At the same time it was recognised that any proposals for amending the existing law would excite keen controversy—from which it was unlikely that any Government would emerge with credit. Special doubt was expressed about the expediency of attempting to amend the criminal law relating to homosexuality.

(c) The suggestion was made that newspapers might be prohibited from publishing details of criminal prosecutions for homosexual offences. If a Private Member could be persuaded to introduce a Bill for this purpose under the ten-minute rule, the arguments for and against a restriction on the reporting of these cases could be publicly stated. If there then appeared to be a substantial amount of public support for such a measure, the Government might facilitate the further stages of the Bill. It was recalled that the legislation applying a similar restriction to divorce proceedings had originated in a Private Member's Bill.

(d) More might perhaps be done to ensure that persons convicted of homosexual offences could obtain facilities for medical treatment.

(e) Lord Winterton had been anxious to raise these questions in a debate in the House of Lords. So far he had been dissuaded from tabling a motion for this purpose; but he could not be prevented indefinitely from doing so.

(f) The view was expressed that, if it were decided to hold an enquiry into these questions, a departmental committee would be more appropriate for the purpose than a Royal Commission.

The Cabinet—

Agreed to resume at a later meeting their discussion of the question whether a formal enquiry should be instituted into the law relating to prostitution and to homosexual offences.
13. The Minister of Labour said that he had now received the reports of the Courts of Enquiry which he had appointed to investigate the wages disputes in the shipbuilding and engineering industries. These would be published on 26th February. They were likely on the whole to be valuable in promoting a settlement. The main recommendations were: (i) that the representatives of employers and workers should negotiate on improvements in the general wage structure and in the conciliation machinery in the two industries; (ii) that there might be established some standing body which could consider and advise on the impact of wage levels on the national economy, and could so provide the necessary background against which wage negotiations in particular industries might be conducted on sound lines; and (iii) that some immediate wage increase, possibly to the extent of about one-third of the Unions' claim, would be justified and that the two sides should resume negotiations with a view to agreeing upon a wage increase of this order. A resumption of negotiations would be a welcome development as it would reduce the likelihood of precipitate action by the Unions to impose a ban on piece-work and overtime or to call a strike. A wage increase to the extent of about one-third of the Unions' claim would amount to some £s., which would be in line with the increases granted recently in other industries.

A dispute was developing between the employers and the stevedores on the question whether the working of overtime was wholly voluntary, which was the view taken by the stevedores, or whether, as the employers contended, men were under an obligation to work some overtime if required by their employers to do so. He had arranged to see representatives of the employers and the stevedores on the following day to explore the possibilities of promoting a settlement. The Transport and General Workers' Union supported the employers' view on this question.

The Cabinet—

Took note of these statements by the Minister of Labour.

Cabinet Office, S.W. 1.
24th February, 1954.