CONCLUSIONS of a Meeting of the Cabinet held at 10 Downing Street, S.W. 1, on Thursday, 29th July, 1954, at 11 a.m.

Present:


The Right Hon. Anthony Eden, M.P., Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs (Items 3-9).

The Right Hon. Lord Simonds, Lord Chancellor.

The Right Hon. R. A. Butler, M.P., Chancellor of the Exchequer.


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. Peter Thorneycroft, M.P., President of the Board of Trade.

The Right Hon. the Marquess of Salisbury, Lord President of the Council.

The Right Hon. Sir David Maxwell Fyfe, 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. Viscount Swinton, Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations.

The Right Hon. James Stuart, M.P., Secretary of State for Scotland.


The Right Hon. Florence Horsbrugh, M.P., Minister of Education.

The Right Hon. Gwilym Lloyd-George, M.P., Minister of Food.

The following were also present:

The Right Hon. J. P. L. Thomas, M.P., First Lord of the Admiralty (Items 4-5).


The Right Hon. Lord De L'Isle and Dudley, Secretary of State for Air (Items 1-5).

Mr. Nigel Birch, M.P., Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Defence (Item 4).

Secretariat:

The Right Hon. Sir Norman Brook.

Mr. R. M. J. Harris.

Mr. K. L. Stock.
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1. The Cabinet considered a report by the Colonial Secretary (C. (54) 243) on his discussions with the Prime Minister of Malta on future constitutional development in Malta.

The Colonial Secretary said that the Cabinet should now consider what action should be taken if, as now seemed likely, Dr. Olivier's reply to the offer to transfer responsibility in London for Maltese affairs to the Home Office was indefinitely delayed. On further reflection he did not now favour the appointment of a Royal Commission on the constitutional and financial problems of Malta; and he recommended that no public mention should be made of this possibility without further reference to the Cabinet. The better course, in his view, was to seek to promote a conference of representatives of all the chief political Parties in Malta, together possibly with certain other local personages, to consider these problems. Such a conference would be presided over by a Colonial Office Minister, who would steer it towards sound conclusions. If, however, such a conference were to fail in its purpose, the Government would be free to adopt whatever course might then seem appropriate. The root of the problem lay in the facts that Malta's problems were basically economic and financial, and that the Maltese Government aimed at combining constitutional and political independence with continued financial support from the United Kingdom Government. He did not, however, exclude the possibility that further discussions might lead to some financial arrangement which would satisfy Malta's needs without involving the United Kingdom Government in additional financial commitments.

The Commonwealth Secretary agreed that it would be inexpedient to appoint a Royal Commission on Malta's constitutional problems. Such a Commission might well recommend that responsibility for Malta's affairs should be transferred to the Commonwealth Relations Office, a solution which should certainly be avoided.

The Cabinet—

(1) Authorised the Colonial Secretary to explore the possibility of arranging a conference of representatives of Maltese political Parties on the future constitutional status of Malta.

(2) Agreed that, without further reference to the Cabinet, no encouragement should be given to the idea that a Royal Commission might be appointed to consider Malta's constitutional and financial problems.

2. The Cabinet had before them a memorandum by the Home Secretary (C. (54) 258) submitting the recommendation of an ad hoc Committee which had reviewed the plans for the future use of Tarrant Rushton airfield in Dorset.

The Home Secretary explained that this airfield had been held under requisition since the war and was about to be bought by the Air Ministry under the Defence Acts as a reserve airfield for use in war. Since 1947 it had been occupied under licence by Sir Alan Cobham's firm, Flight Refuelling Ltd. Two main questions had now to be decided:

(i) should the Government allow the activities of Flight Refuelling Ltd. at Tarrant Rushton to continue?

(ii) before making known their decision under (i) above, should the Government arrange for the holding of any further enquiry?

His Committee were satisfied that the Air Ministry should be authorised, when they had bought the airfield, to grant a twenty-one
year lease to Flight Refuelling Ltd., provided that the terms of the lease would ensure observance of the conditions which had been laid down by the Dorset County Planning Committee after an informal meeting held at the airfield on 21st June and were set out in paragraph 7 of C. (54) 258. On the question of an enquiry the Committee had been advised by the Minister of Housing that it would be a misuse of the statutory procedure to reopen the public enquiry into the County Development Plan for the limited purpose in view. They had also satisfied themselves that the circumstances were not appropriate for an enquiry under section 26 of the Town and Country Planning Act, 1947, or under paragraph 50 of the White Paper “Needs of the Armed Forces for Land for Training and Other Purposes” (Cmd. 7278). The Committee had therefore concluded that any further pressure for an enquiry should be resisted.

The Secretary of State for Air said that the Tarrant Rushton airfield would be required by the R.A.F. in war and that nearly all the peace-time activities of Flight Refuelling Ltd., which were indicated in paragraph 4 of C. (54) 258, were also of importance for defence purposes. He believed that much of the local anxiety could be allayed if it could be demonstrated that the use of the airfield would be limited to what was necessary for defence purposes. The Conservative Agricultural Committee, with whom he had discussed the matter, were not likely to raise serious objection if the terms of the lease granted to Sir Alan Cobham were suitably restrictive.

The Minister of Housing said that the Government were likely to be exposed to some public criticism over this matter, whatever course they adopted. If they declined to hold an enquiry they would be open to the criticism that Tarrant Rushton had been shown in the County Development Plan as a civilian airfield, “primarily used for commercial purposes,” which was clearly not an accurate description of the true position there. If they held the enquiry, it would be said that an enquiry conducted by one of the Minister’s inspectors, whose report would be made to the Minister and would not be published, could not have been expected to affect the Government’s decision. On balance, therefore, he had agreed with the Home Secretary’s Committee in favouring an attempt to promote an agreed settlement of this dispute without holding any further enquiry. The County Planning Authority would be satisfied if their conditions were met, and they were opposed to any further enquiry. There seemed to be a reasonable prospect of securing an agreement acceptable to all the interested parties save Commander Marten.

There was general agreement in the Cabinet that the problem should be handled on these lines.

The Lord President said that he did not dissent from this conclusion, but it must be recognised that continuance of the activities of Flight Refuelling Ltd. in what had hitherto been pre-eminently a rural area would be bound to change the character of the neighbourhood and to do some damage to local agricultural interests.

The Prime Minister said that the vital importance to the R.A.F. of development of flight refuelling went a long way towards justifying an attempt to promote a settlement of this dispute by agreement and without incurring the risks which any public enquiry was bound to involve. If, however, the attempt to promote such a settlement should fail, the Cabinet ought clearly to reconsider whether, in the circumstances which then obtained, some further form of public enquiry ought not to be conceded.

The Cabinet—

(1) Invited the Secretary of State for Air to seek to promote the widest possible measure of agreement on the grant to Flight Refuelling Ltd. of a twenty-one year lease of Tarrant Rushton airfield, the terms of which should fully
safeguard the conditions which had been laid down by the Dorset County Planning Committee and were summarised in paragraph 7 of C. (54) 258.

(2) Agreed that, if the Secretary of State failed to secure a substantial measure of agreement on the future use of the airfield, the Cabinet should consider further the expediency of holding some form of public enquiry before such a lease was granted to Flight Refuelling Ltd.

3. The Cabinet had before them a memorandum by the Home Secretary and the Secretary of State for Scotland (C. (54) 166) on the recommendations made in the Report of the Royal Commission on Capital Punishment (Cmd. 8932).

The Home Secretary said that all the three major recommendations of the Commission, set out in paragraph 3 of C. (54) 166, were in his judgment unacceptable. Of the Commission's minor recommendations, reproduced in the appendix to his memorandum, some could be put into effect by administrative action. The remainder were useful suggestions for amendment of the existing law, but he did not favour early introduction of the necessary legislation. Before the end of the next Parliamentary session, time would have to be provided for a debate on the Commission's Report. He suggested that the Government spokesman in such a debate should say that the Government felt grave doubts about the wisdom of the Commission's main recommendations but, in coming to a final conclusion, would wish to take account of the views expressed in the debate. Although the Commission had been precluded by their terms of reference from considering whether or not capital punishment should be retained, the sole result of their labours might well have been to establish the fact that there was no scope for substantial modification of the present law and administration relating to capital punishment, and that the issue which remained was whether capital punishment should be retained or abolished. He himself was convinced that it should be retained.

The Secretary of State for Scotland expressed his agreement with the Home Secretary, whose views proved generally acceptable to the Cabinet.

The Attorney-General suggested that, when the time came for the Government to announce their views on the matter, they might well go beyond saying that they felt grave doubts about accepting the Royal Commission's recommendations. The Cabinet agreed that the Government would be justified in stating that they were disposed to reject the Royal Commission's main recommendations, but that they were naturally ready to give due consideration to any fresh arguments which might be advanced in support of them in the course of Parliamentary debate.

The Cabinet—

(1) Endorsed generally the conclusions of the Home Secretary and the Secretary of State for Scotland, as set out in paragraphs 13-14 of C. (54) 166.

(2) Authorised the Home Secretary to announce, when this question came to be debated in the House of Commons, that the Government were not disposed to accept the main recommendations of the Royal Commission.
PUBLIC RECORD OFFICE

Group/Class CAB 128

Piece 27

cc (54) 56th Conclusions, Item 4

CLOSED UNTIL 2005

(date) - 3 Oct 1984

(Signed) Smith
Gibraltar.
Pay of industrial workers.
(Previous Reference: C.C. (54) 30th Conclusions, Minute 4.)

5. The Cabinet had before them memoranda by the Minister of Labour (C. (54) 253) and by the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the First Lord of the Admirality (C. (54) 259) on the remuneration of industrial workers in Gibraltar.

The Minister of Labour said that, in accordance with the Cabinet's request, he had examined the scale of the remuneration paid by the Service Departments to the Spanish workers whom they employed in Gibraltar. At present, workers of Spanish nationality received only half of the cost-of-living allowance which was paid to
nationals of Gibraltar irrespective of whether the workers concerned were resident in Gibraltar or in Spain. The Cabinet had agreed that some change in this discrimination should be made and he had come to the conclusion that it would be preferable to solve this difficulty by adopting the same rate of wages and cost-of-living allowances for Gibraltarians and Spanish workers alike. This solution was favoured by the Government of Gibraltar and would accord with the practice generally followed by private employers. His proposal was based on applying the principle of the rate for the job without differentiation according to nationality or domicile. An alternative solution would be to assess the cost-of-living allowance payable to Spanish workers resident in Spain on the basis of a comparison of the cost of living in Spain and in Gibraltar respectively.

The Foreign Secretary said that the present discrimination against Spanish nationals provided the Spanish Government with an opportunity for damaging propaganda against us. He would prefer that this ground of complaint against us should be removed.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer said that the Treasury and the Service Departments were reluctant to agree to the abolition of the differential in the cost-of-living allowances for the reasons set out in C. (54) 259. If the remuneration of Spaniards employed in Gibraltar were increased, agitation might develop among Gibraltarians for an increase in their remuneration to preserve the advantage which they had enjoyed for some years. He would prefer a more gradual approach to the problem; and he suggested that no more should be done for the moment than to reduce the existing differential from 24s. to 14s. a week by adding 10s. to the current rate of allowance for the cost of living in Spain.

The Cabinet—

Invited the Colonial Secretary to seek the views of the Governor of Gibraltar on the question whether the position could not be held for the time being by increasing from 24s. to 34s. a week the cost-of-living allowance for Spaniards employed by the Service Departments in Gibraltar.

The Cabinet—

6. The Cabinet had before them a memorandum by the Home Secretary (C. (54) 256) on the abolition of the visa requirement for German and Austrian visitors to this country.

The Home Secretary said that the Foreign Secretary had asked him to waive the requirements that the passports of German and Austrian visitors to the United Kingdom should bear a British visa. While recognising the force of the political considerations which had prompted the Foreign Secretary's request, he had felt it necessary to inform the Cabinet of the objections to which this proposal was open on security grounds. The Federal Government in Western Germany were willing to issue a passport to any refugee from Eastern Germany who could show that he was a German; and, if Germans visiting this country were no longer required to obtain a British visa, undesirable Germans from Eastern Germany would have less difficulty in making their way into this country.

The Foreign Secretary said that this requirement had now been waived by all European countries except the United Kingdom, the Irish Republic and Portugal. It was undesirable that we should appear less friendly to Western Germany than were other European countries and less forward in promoting free communications within Europe. He recognised that there would be a certain security risk in adopting his proposal but he believed that this was outweighed by the wider considerations of foreign policy which he had mentioned.
The Prime Minister said that, before this step was taken, the Cabinet should know what numbers would be involved.

The Cabinet—

(1) Invited the Home Secretary to circulate for their information a statement indicating the number of Germans and Austrians who had come to the United Kingdom in recent years for visits of less than three months.

(2) Agreed, subject to any points which members of the Cabinet might wish to raise in the light of this statement, that German and Austrian nationals visiting the United Kingdom for less than three months should no longer be required to obtain a British visa.

The Foreign Secretary said that he wished to ascertain the views of his colleagues on the desirability of offering a loan of up to £5 million to Persia. This would take the form of an export credit guarantee. A tied loan of this kind would assist the recovery of our former share of the Persian market. The timing of our offer would be considered in the light of progress in the negotiations with the Persian Government for a settlement of the oil dispute. It would also be necessary to consider its relation to any loan which the United States Government might be intending to offer to Persia.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer said that in principle he supported the suggestion outlined by the Foreign Secretary.

The Cabinet—

Agreed in principle that a loan of £5 million should be offered to Persia in the form of an export credit guarantee; and invited the Chancellor of the Exchequer to consider the timing of this offer in consultation with the Foreign Secretary.

The Prime Minister said that Mr. Oliver Lyttelton had resigned his office as Colonial Secretary and this would be the last meeting of the Cabinet which he would attend. He knew that the Cabinet would wish him to express their deep regret at the loss of a colleague whose untiring service had been of such value both to the present Government and to the Coalition Government during the war.

The Prime Minister said that meetings of the Cabinet would be kept to a minimum during the first part of the summer recess. In August, meetings would be held only when there was urgent business to be transacted, and these meetings need be attended only by Ministers who were in London or within easy reach of it.

Cabinet Office, S.W. 1,
29th July, 1954.