CABINET

CONCLUSIONS of a Meeting of the Cabinet held at 10 Downing Street, S.W. 1., on Thursday, 24th April, 1958, at 11 a.m.

Present:
The Right Hon. HAROLD MACMILLAN, M.P., Prime Minister.
The Right Hon. SELWYN LLOYD, Q.C., M.P., Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.
The Right Hon. The EARL OF HOME, Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations.
The Right Hon. JOHN MACLAY, M.P., Secretary of State for Scotland.
The Right Hon. DUNCAN SANDYS, M.P., Minister of Defence.
The Right Hon. IAIN MACLEOD, M.P., Minister of Labour and National Service.
The Right Hon. LORD MILLS, Minister of Power.
The Right Hon. GEOFFREY LLOYD, M.P., Minister of Education.
The Right Hon. REGINALD MAUDLING, M.P., Paymaster-General.

The following were also present:
The Right Hon. DEREK WALKER-SMITH, Q.C., M.P., Minister of Health (Item 3).
The Right Hon. EDWARD HEATH, M.P., Parliamentary Secretary, Treasury.

Secretariat:
The Right Hon. SIR NORMAN BROOK.
Mr. B. ST. J. TREND.
Mr. M. REED.
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1. The Cabinet were informed of the business to be taken in the House of Commons in the following week.

2. The Foreign Secretary said that the Soviet Government were being pressed to agree that, in the diplomatic discussions which were to precede the meeting of Foreign Ministers, the Ambassadors of the three Western Powers should deal jointly, rather than separately, with the Soviet Foreign Minister. The Soviet Government were likely, for their part, to revive their earlier proposal that certain Soviet satellite countries, such as Poland and Czechoslovakia, should be represented at any meeting of Heads of Governments. It would be necessary to consider, in concert with the United States Government, what response we should make to such a proposal.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer said that agreement had now been reached with the Federal German Government about the level of their contribution to the costs of maintaining British troops in Germany. In the current year this contribution would consist of a cash payment of £12 millions together with a sum of £22½ millions, representing an advance repayment of those instalments of the German post-war debt which would fall due in the years 1962–64. In addition, the German Government would deposit in London a sum of £50 millions as an advance payment for defence equipment. In the two subsequent years the German Government would continue the annual contribution of £12 millions.

The German Government agreed that, as part of this settlement, the strength of our forces would be reduced from 55,000 to 45,000 during 1959. But this reduction still required the approval of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation and the Western European Union, which would not easily be obtained. In particular the United States Government and the Supreme Allied Commander, Europe, would be reluctant to accept this further withdrawal of British troops from Europe. For budgetary purposes, however, we had assumed that our forces in Germany would be reduced to 45,000 during 1959; and although we should seek to reduce to a minimum the area of disagreement with our Allies, we must continue to rest on this hypothesis.

In discussion it was suggested that it would be desirable, before seeking the approval of the Western European Union to our agreement with the German Government, to ascertain whether the members of the North Atlantic Alliance were prepared to provide an additional financial contribution which might make it possible for us to maintain in Germany a rather larger number of troops than 45,000 for one more year and so to extend the run-down of British forces over a rather longer period. The forthcoming meeting of the North Atlantic Council at Copenhagen would provide a convenient opportunity of ascertaining the attitude of the United States Government to an arrangement of this kind.

The Cabinet—

Invited the Foreign Secretary, in consultation with the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Minister of Defence, to consider the best means of securing United States support in the North Atlantic Council for our agreement with the Federal German Government on the costs of maintaining British forces in Germany.
3. The Cabinet had before them a memorandum by the Minister of Health (C. (58) 84) to which was annexed a minute by the Secretary of the Medical Research Council (M.R.C.), and a memorandum by the Lord President (C. (58) 85) on the problem of vaccination against poliomyelitis during the summer of 1958.

The demand for vaccination had proved greater and the supply of vaccine (both British and Salk) less than had been expected—with the result that, if the present system of testing Salk vaccine were maintained, 2½ million people registered for vaccination would not have been vaccinated by the end of June. The only way to avoid that situation was to cut down or to suspend the testing of Salk vaccine by the M.R.C., but the M.R.C. had themselves advised against either reducing or suspending the tests. The Minister of Health proposed, nevertheless, that the M.R.C. tests should be abridged by the omission of the second of the three safety tests (a tissue culture test) or, alternatively, that both this and the third test (on live monkeys) should be omitted. The Lord President, in his memorandum, presented the case for maintaining in full the present testing by the M.R.C. He concluded that, if any departure was to be made from the present system, it would be preferable to suspend the M.R.C. tests altogether rather than reduce them.

Discussion showed that opinion in the Cabinet was divided on this issue. On the one hand it was pointed out that, if the present system were maintained, the vaccination of the 2½ million people concerned could not begin until late in July nor be completed until the end of September, which was the end of the normal poliomyelitis season; and in an average year there would occur among them 300 cases of paralytic poliomyelitis, about 200 of which would have been saved by the injection of Salk vaccine untested by the M.R.C. If this turned out to be a bad year there might be as many as 600 paralytic cases. If testing by the M.R.C. were suspended, it would be possible to vaccinate by the end of June all those who had registered. In that case about 100 paralytic cases could be expected to occur among them in an average year, but there would be some risk of a "Cutter" incident caused by mutation of the virus, which might produce some hundreds of paralytic cases in addition. Unless a "Cutter" incident were to occur it was certain that there would be more paralytic poliomyelitis among children if the M.R.C. tests were retained in full than if they were abridged or suspended. The Government would be attacked for failing to fulfil their undertaking to provide vaccine for all those in the priority classes who registered before the onset of the poliomyelitis season, and it would be difficult to defend a refusal to use available vaccine which had been used on a large scale throughout the United States and Canada and other parts of the world. Parents would be denied the opportunity to choose between vaccination of their children with vaccine tested only by the Americans or Canadians and no vaccination at all. While a serious mishap might shake public confidence in any type of poliomyelitis vaccine in the future, no sample testing, even as carried out by the M.R.C., could guarantee the safety of any particular batch. The tissue culture test which the Minister of Health wished to dispense with during the period of emergency was the least important of the three safety tests and had, indeed, recently failed to detect live virus in a batch of Salk vaccine.

On the other side it was argued that the Government would be assuming a heavy responsibility if they overrode the advice given by the M.R.C. on this question. There was no method by which to evaluate the risk of another incident of the "Cutter" type. Even if the full facts and the advice given by the M.R.C. were put before the public the reaction of individual parents and general practitioners to the risk would vary and they would find it difficult to reach a fully informed decision. The time actually saved by abridging the M.R.C. tests was open to question and there were obvious objections to requiring the M.R.C. to carry out tests which they regarded as unsatisfactory. Moreover, it could be inferred from information provided by the M.R.C. that some time could be saved even with the...
retention of the present tests if 5,000 litres of Salk vaccine were ordered instead of the 4,000 litres authorised by the Home Affairs Committee.

Summing up the discussion, the Prime Minister said that whatever decision was taken on the question of testing it was desirable than an additional 1,000 litres of Salk vaccine should be purchased. On the main issue the crucial question was whether a child would be at greater risk this summer if he were vaccinated with Salk vaccine untested by the M.R.C. or if he were not vaccinated at all. The M.R.C. should be invited to express a view on this. They should also be asked to elaborate and explain some of the arguments used in their report. For these purposes representatives of the M.R.C. might be invited to meet the Prime Minister and the other Ministers principally concerned before the next meeting of the Cabinet.

The Cabinet—
(1) Authorised the Minister of Health to purchase 1,000 litres of Salk vaccine in addition to the 4,000 litres already authorised.
(2) Took note that the Prime Minister, Secretary of State for Scotland, Lord President, Minister of Education, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister of Health would meet representatives of the Medical Research Council to discuss certain questions on which further information was required.
(3) Agreed to resume their discussion at a meeting early in the following week.

4. The Prime Minister informed the Cabinet that, together with the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Minister of Transport, he had discussed with representatives of the British Transport Commission and the railway unions the situation which had arisen as a result of the rejection by the Railway Arbitration Tribunal of the railwaymen’s claim for an increase in wages. He had considered carefully whether this situation called for an intervention by the Government at this juncture. But the extent of the Exchequer interest in the railways had, in his judgment, justified the meeting; and he was satisfied that he had succeeded in making it clear to the union representatives that the Government were not prepared to increase the present scale of their financial assistance to the Commission in relation to its current expenditure but were ready to take part, with the Commission and the unions, in a tripartite effort to increase efficiency and productivity on the railways. For this purpose he had indicated that, if the Commission and the unions were prepared to secure the maximum economies in operation and to join in ensuring the most efficient use of man-power, the Government would be willing to re-examine the programme of railway modernisation and to support reductions in uneconomic services and such other measures of rationalisation as the Commission might propose.

In discussion it was agreed that it now lay with the Commission and the unions to indicate how far they were willing to respond to this initiative. Meanwhile, the Government should make as little further comment as possible, although they should discreetly let it be known that it did not represent the beginning of a new phase of negotiation in which the unions might extract further concessions.

The Cabinet—
Took note, with approval, of these statements.