CONCLUSIONS of a Meeting of the Cabinet held at 10 Downing Street, S.W. 1, on Thursday, 17th July, 1958, at 11 a.m. 

Present:

The Right Hon. HAROLD MACMILLAN, M.P., Prime Minister (Item 1)

The Right Hon. R. A. BUTLER, M.P., Secretary of State for the Home Department and Lord Privy Seal (in the Chair for Items 2–7).

The Right Hon. D. HEATHCOAT AMORY, M.P., Chancellor of the Exchequer.

The Right Hon. ALAN LENNOX-BOYD, M.P., Secretary of State for the Colonies.

The Right Hon. VISCOUNT HAILSHAM, Q.C., Lord President of the Council.

The Right Hon. Sir DAVID ECCLES, M.P., President of the Board of Trade.

The Right Hon. HENRY BROOKE, M.P., Minister of Housing and Local Government and Minister for Welsh Affairs.

The Right Hon. GEOFFREY LLOYD, M.P., Minister of Education.

Dr. The Right Hon. CHARLES HILL, M.P., Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster.

The Right Hon. VISCOUNT KILMUIR, Lord Chancellor.

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 (Item 1).

The Right Hon. IAIN MACLEOD, M.P., Minister of Labour and National Service.

The Right Hon. HAROLD WATKINSON, M.P., Minister of Transport and Civil Aviation.

The Right Hon. JOHN HARE, M.P., Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

The Right Hon. REGINALD MAULDING, M.P., Paymaster-General.

The following were also present:

The Right Hon. ALLAN NOBLE, M.P., Minister of State for Foreign Affairs. | The Right Hon. EDWARD HEATH, M.P., Parliamentary Secretary, Treasury.

Secretariat:

The Right Hon. Sir NORMAN BROOK.
Mr. B. ST. J. TREND.
Mr. J. M. WILSON.
Mr. M. REED.
Mr. P. R. ODGERS.
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1. The Prime Minister said that the operation which the Cabinet had approved at their previous meeting was in danger of being interrupted by the failure of the Government of Israel to grant our request for permission to over-fly Israeli territory, although they had sanctioned the proposed demonstration by United States aircraft over Israel and Jordan. On our initiative the United States Government had now given the Government of Israel the assurance that they fully supported our intervention in Jordan; and he had himself sent a personal message to the Prime Minister of Israel emphasising the urgency of our request, which the Israeli Cabinet were now considering. Meanwhile the leading British aircraft, carrying the Commander of our troops, had disregarded Israeli orders to turn back and had had a friendly reception in Jordan. Several additional aircraft had subsequently reached Amman and the force now in position amounted to some 400 men. But unless we could rely on permission to over-fly Israeli territory as a routine measure for the supply and reinforcement of our troops, it would be impracticable to provide assistance to Jordan on the scale which we had originally contemplated. In these circumstances there appeared to be no alternative but to suspend the operation until we had obtained the necessary permission from the Government of Israel and had considered any conditions which they might attach to their consent.

In discussion it was recognised that this development might prejudice our ability to counter the threat to Jordan in time. Moreover, announcements were already appearing in the Press that a British force was being sent to Jordan in response to a request for assistance from King Hussein; and it would be necessary to make a statement in Parliament on the subject that afternoon. If we had not obtained permission to over-fly Israeli territory by the time that this statement had to be made, it would be inadvisable to attempt to conceal the reason for the delay in providing support for Jordan and it would be necessary to admit that, pending a decision by the Government of Israel, we had established only an advance party in Amman.

The Cabinet—

Agreed to resume their discussion when it was known whether the Government of Israel would grant us permission to over-fly Israeli territory in connection with the transport to Amman of the British troops intended to reinforce King Hussein of Jordan.

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

3. The Home Secretary said that he intended to make in the following week a statement on Parliamentary privilege in relation to letters from Members of Parliament to Ministers. Ministers who were asked to investigate criticisms of the administration of public services could not do so satisfactorily without forwarding to the public bodies concerned the letters from Members or their constituents in which the criticisms were made; but he proposed that further advice should be given to Departments on the exercise of discretion in handling correspondence of this kind.

The Cabinet—

Took note, with approval, of this statement by the Lord Privy Seal.

* Later in the day a message was received from the Israeli Government acquiescing in this over-flying of Israeli territory, and the movement of British troops into Jordan was completed.

† Previously recorded in a Confidential Annex.
4. The Cabinet had before them memoranda by the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (C. (58) 138 and 139) reporting the progress achieved in the development of Government information services at home and overseas and discussing the method of financing new developments in the oversea services.

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster recalled that a year ago the Cabinet had agreed that expenditure on oversea information services might be incurred up to £15 millions a year on the understanding that this figure would not be exceeded without further Cabinet authority. Increases in costs, however, had already raised expenditure on these services so near the approved limit that no margin remained for important new projects such as the proposal to expand the British Council's educational work in the Horn of Africa on the lines described in Appendix B to C. (58) 139. This proposal was only one example of urgent and essential developments which were liable to be frustrated by lack of funds. Other cases would shortly demand attention, particularly the provision of broadcast relay facilities in the Horn of Africa. An examination had been made of the possibility of financing the current proposal, estimated to cost about £100,000 in a full financial year, from compensating economies in other information services; and Appendix C to C. (58) 139 illustrated the reductions which would be required if the new enterprise was to be accommodated within the limit of £15 millions. There were strong objections to each of these possible economies. Moreover, urgent decisions were liable to be delayed if, on each occasion when a new project was under consideration, the whole field of hypothetical savings had to be reviewed. He wished, therefore, to feel free to seek the authority of the Cabinet, in appropriate cases, to incur expenditure on important new developments in excess of the £15 millions limit.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer said that, without detracting from the value of the oversea information services, he was obliged, in current financial circumstances, to stipulate that any new projects, however important, should be financed from economies on the existing services and that the limit of £15 millions should not be exceeded. In discussion it was suggested that the figure of £15 millions had not originally been regarded by the Cabinet as an absolute maximum which might in no circumstances be exceeded. On the other hand, the principle of an upper limit to expenditure was not lightly to be breached if compensating economies could be achieved without undue sacrifice. A new project might be justified by changes in circumstances, and it could be submitted to the Cabinet for consideration on its merits. But the Cabinet should not be invited to accept the expenditure entailed as necessarily additional to the allocation of £15 millions until the possibilities of achieving offsetting savings had been exhaustively examined.

The Cabinet—
(1) Took note of C. (58) 138.
(2) Invited the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, in consultation with the Foreign Secretary, the Commonwealth Secretary and the Colonial Secretary, to examine the practicability of financing the proposed developments in the information services in the Horn of Africa by reductions in the other oversea information services and, if necessary, to submit proposals thereafter to the Cabinet.

5. The Cabinet had before them a memorandum by the Minister of Labour (C. (58) 141) on two Conventions, each with a supplementary Recommendation, adopted by the 40th session of the International Labour Conference.

The Minister of Labour said that Convention No. 106 provided that all persons employed in commerce and offices should be entitled to an uninterrupted weekly rest period of not less than twenty-four hours.
Entitlement to a weekly rest period was in this country already well established by custom and ratification of this Convention would impose on Her Majesty's Government an unnecessary obligation to enforce it.

Convention No. 107 provided international standards for the protection and integration of indigenous and other tribal and semi-tribal populations in independent countries. This had no application to the United Kingdom.

He therefore proposed that Her Majesty's Government should take no action to ratify these Conventions and Recommendations and that, in accordance with precedent, a White Paper should be published indicating the reasons for this decision.

The Cabinet—

Approved the proposal in C. (58) 141.

6. The Cabinet had before them a memorandum by the Home Secretary (C. (58) 143) discussing the future of the Anglo-Egyptian Resettlement Board.

The Home Secretary said that the Board themselves had suggested that they should be disbanded by 31st December, 1958. While, however, the bulk of their work would have been completed by that time, there would remain a number of refugees who could probably never be resettled in the normal sense. The most difficult category consisted of elderly and formerly prosperous people whom it would be both harsh and politically embarrassing to reduce abruptly to National Assistance Board standards of maintenance. He therefore proposed that a decision on the winding up of the Resettlement Board should be deferred until it was clear whether the resumed negotiations with the Egyptian Government for a financial settlement were likely to have a successful outcome and whether satisfactory arrangements could be made to deal with the residual problems of resettling the refugees from Egypt.

Discussion showed that there was general agreement with this proposal. Moreover, the Government were under increasing pressure to accelerate the settlement of the claims of British subjects to compensation in respect of Egyptianised property and damage to sequestrated property, and it might become necessary, in order to demonstrate the Government's sympathy with these claimants, to agree that the arrangements for ex-gratia advances which had hitherto been confined to claims in respect of private property should be extended to claims in respect of business assets. These arrangements were operated by the Resettlement Board; and it would therefore be inopportune to disband the Board at the present juncture.

The Cabinet—

Agreed to defer a decision on the winding up of the Anglo-Egyptian Resettlement Board.

7. The Cabinet had before them a memorandum by the Secretary of State for Scotland and the Minister of Agriculture (C. (58) 150) on forestry policy. This proposal that the planting programme of the Forestry Commission should be settled for ten years at a time. For the five years 1959–63 planting should be at the rate of about 60,000 acres a year and for the following quinquennium should be reduced to 235,000 acres in all. The extent of planting in the second ten-year period should be reviewed in five years' time. In the choice of areas to be planted special attention should be paid to the social needs of Scotland and Wales. In the private sector grant
aid to private owners should be improved; but in future the trend of receipts as well as of costs should be taken into account in the periodical reviews of the level of grants, with the result that grants should eventually be reduced to a nominal amount. The present system for licensing felling should be continued, but its administration should be somewhat relaxed.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer said that, whereas the recent interdepartmental Working Party had recommended that current strategic and economic requirements pointed towards a deliberate reversal of the previous policy of fostering an increasing forest estate, the draft Parliamentary statement annexed to C. (58) 150 might be thought to create the opposite impression of the Government's intentions. On the other hand the Home Affairs Committee had thought it unwise, having regard to the long-term nature of afforestation, to make any drastic change of emphasis at this stage in our forestry policy. They had, however, accepted a significant reduction in planting in the period 1964–68; and they had recognised that payment of grants to private owners should not be continued beyond the point at which receipts and costs were in balance. The flexibility of the Government’s policy might be further illustrated if the draft statement made it clear, in paragraph 2, that the review in 1963 of the second ten-year programme would be conducted on the basis of a reassessment of the national needs at the time.

In further discussion the following points were made: —

(a) In order to reassure the Scottish crofters, who attached importance to adequate afforestation, the draft statement should emphasise that an annual planting programme of 60,000 acres involved some increase on the current rate of planting.

(b) The statement should also stress the fact that, by concentrating planting in Scotland and Wales, the Government would not only be meeting a social need but would also be adopting a practical policy for the diversification of industry in remote areas which would always be unattractive to manufacturing enterprises.

(c) The section on private forestry in the statement should be clarified in order to make it plain that it referred to grant aid calculated on an aggregate, not on an individual, basis.

(d) The Agriculture Ministers were discussing with the Minister of Housing detailed arrangements for the control of felling.

(e) In order to allay the anxieties of private owners it would be desirable to announce the Government’s policy before the summer recess.

The Cabinet—

(1) Invited the Secretary of State for Scotland and the Minister of Agriculture, in consultation with the Home Secretary and the Chancellor of the Exchequer, to revise the draft Parliamentary statement in the light of the points made in the discussion.

(2) Subject to Conclusion (1) above, approved the proposals in C. (58) 150 and invited the Secretary of State for Scotland and the Minister of Agriculture to consult with the Home Secretary about the timing of the proposed statement in Parliament.

Cabinet Office, S.W. 1,
17th July, 1958.