CABINET

CONCLUSIONS of a Meeting of the Cabinet held at Admiralty House, S.W. 1, on Tuesday, 14th March, 1961, at 10-30 a.m.

Present:
The Right Hon. R. A. BUTLER, M.P., Secretary of State for the Home Department (in the Chair)
The Right Hon. VISCOUNT KILMUIR, Lord Chancellor
The Right Hon. THE EARL OF HOME, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs
The Right Hon. JOHN MACLAY, M.P., Secretary of State for Scotland
The Right Hon. SIR DAVID ECCLES, M.P., Minister of Education
The Right Hon. LORD MILLS, Paymaster-General
The Right Hon. JOHN HARE, M.P., Minister of Labour
Dr. The Right Hon. CHARLES HILL, M.P., Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster
The Right Hon. SELWYN LLOYD, Q.C., M.P., Chancellor of the Exchequer
The Right Hon. VISCOUNT HAILSHAM, Q.C., Lord President of the Council and Minister for Science
The Right Hon. HAROLD WATKINSON, M.P., Minister of Defence
The Right Hon. PETER THORNEYCROFT, M.P., Minister of Aviation
The Right Hon. REGINALD MAUDLING, M.P., President of the Board of Trade
The Right Hon. EDWARD HEATH, M.P., Lord Privy Seal
The Right Hon. ERNEST MARPLES, M.P., Minister of Transport
The Right Hon. CHRISTOPHER SOAMES, M.P., Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food

Also present:
The Right Hon. MARTIN REDMAYNE, M.P., Parliamentary Secretary, Treasury

Secretary:
Mr. F. A. BISHOP
Mr. M. REED
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1. The Foreign Secretary said that the Congolese provincial leaders, with the exception of Mr. Gizenga, had agreed at the meeting in Madagascar on a confederal form of constitution for the Congo Republic. It also seemed that, with the departure of Mr. Dayal, the Congolese military authorities might now be prepared to co-operate with the United Nations representatives and forces in the Congo. There was therefore some reason to hope that the situation might improve.

2. The Foreign Secretary said that the United States Ambassador in the Soviet Union had urged upon Mr. Khrushchev the merits of establishing a commission of neutral countries as a means to ensure the genuine neutrality of Laos. Mr. Khrushchev had agreed with the objective of a neutral Laos but had not committed himself as to the means of attaining this.

There was now some indication that it might in time be possible to secure the participation of Prince Souvanna Phouma, who had recently met General Phoumi, in a broadened Government. There would be an opportunity for further discussion of this problem with the United States Secretary of State at the forthcoming meeting of the South-East Asia Treaty Organisation.

3. The Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries said that the fisheries agreement with Iceland, having been passed by the Icelandic Parliament, had now been signed and had been accepted by the leaders of the different sections of the United Kingdom industry. The Grimsby trawler skippers were, however, threatening to refuse to take their vessels to sea if landings of Icelandic fish were renewed. Although the agreement was now binding on the Icelandic Government as on ourselves, a reimposition of the ban on the catches of their ships would have an unfortunate effect on our relations with them and every effort would be made to persuade the British skippers to accept counsels of moderation.

The Cabinet—
Took note of this statement by the Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries.

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

The Home Secretary said that, if the Opposition continued to obstruct virtually all Government business, it would be impossible to complete the programme of legislation designed for the current session, even if the Whitsun recess were shortened and if Parliament were to sit until 3rd August and resume the session in the second half of October. It might therefore be necessary to defer until the following session the Bills relating to Road Traffic, Depositors,
Criminal Justice (Scotland) and Oversea Resources Development. It might even be necessary, in addition, to give up the attempt to secure the passage of the Bills which had already been introduced on Weights and Measures, Suicide and the Crown Estate, despite the fact that substantial progress had already been made with the first two of these.

In discussion it was recognised that, while some reduction in the programme could hardly be avoided, deferment of all the Bills referred to by the Home Secretary would be acutely embarrassing to the Government. It might therefore be worth while to try to secure the Opposition’s agreement to facilitating at least such of them as had wide popular appeal; if agreement could not be obtained, it might then be possible to show that the Government could not be held to blame for deferring this legislation. It was agreed, however, that no more legislation should be introduced until possible tactics and the implications of deferment had been further considered by the Ministers concerned.

The Cabinet—

Took note that the Home Secretary would give further consideration, in consultation with the Ministers concerned, to the possibility of deferring the introduction of the Road Traffic, Depositors, Criminal Justice (Scotland) and Oversea Resources Development Bills, and of suspending progress on the Weights and Measures, Suicide and Crown Estate Bills.

5. The Minister of Transport said that he wished to make a statement on 16th March about the initial steps he proposed to take to implement the reorganisation of the British Transport Commission. The present Chairman of the Commission, Sir Brian Robertson, was to retire as from 1st June and was to receive, as compensation for the loss of 2½ years’ expectation of office, the sum of £12,500 (part of which would be subject to tax) in addition to his normal superannuation award. The Minister had decided to appoint as Chairman-Designate of the new Railways Board Dr. Richard Beeching, a Director of Imperial Chemical Industries Ltd., who had agreed to release him for five years. Dr. Beeching’s salary was to be the equivalent of his present remuneration, namely £24,000.

In discussion it was agreed that, while the salary which it was proposed to pay Dr. Beeching was likely not only to attract comment but to have some effect on future levels of remuneration in the nationalised industries generally, it was necessary that these industries should be enabled to attract men of the right calibre by offering competitive salaries. It was, indeed, only by doing so that they could hope to put their economy on a sound footing.

In further discussion various drafting amendments to the statement proposed by the Minister of Transport were approved. It was also agreed that it would be preferable that the statement should be deferred until the following week, if the necessary meeting of the Transport Commission could be adjusted accordingly.

The Cabinet—

(1) Authorised the Minister of Transport to make a statement on the reorganisation of the British Transport Commission on the lines he proposed, subject to the amendments agreed in their discussion.

(2) Invited the Minister of Transport to defer the statement until the following week if the necessary arrangements could be made with the British Transport Commission.
6. The Cabinet had before them a memorandum by the Home Secretary (C. (61) 34) about defence facilities in the United Kingdom for the Federal German forces.

The Home Secretary recalled that, at their meeting on 16th February, the Cabinet had approved the provision of certain defence facilities in this country for the Federal German armed forces, including facilities for tank range training for one armoured regiment at a time. They had felt, however, that it would be preferable not to offer the German forces the benefits of the Visiting Forces Act, 1952, unless we were under some definite obligation to do so. He was now satisfied, in agreement with the Minister of Defence and the Foreign Secretary, that it would be necessary to extend to the German forces the provisions of the Visiting Forces Act and the Application of Law Order made under it. It was impracticable for an armed force of one country to function satisfactorily in another country unless these facilities were conferred; and as soon as the Federal Republic ratified the Status of Forces Agreement reached by the North Atlantic Alliance (which was expected in the following year) we should be under a definite treaty obligation to extend the Act to them.

Discussion showed that the Cabinet were in general agreement with the Home Secretary's proposal. The extension of the Visiting Forces Act would, however, require affirmative resolutions of both Houses of Parliament and, from the Parliamentary point of view, the balance of advantage probably lay in deferring the debates for as long as possible. The extension should, however, be effected before the beginning of the following session and it should be explained meanwhile to the German Government that they could not be given any of the facilities they sought until that had been done.

The Cabinet—

Took note that the Home Secretary, in consultation with the Minister of Defence and the Foreign Secretary, would prepare the necessary orders for extending to the Federal German forces the Visiting Forces Act, 1952, and the Application of Law Order; would in due course submit the orders to the Legislation Committee; and would give further consideration to the timing of their introduction.