CABINET 25 (46).

CONCLUSIONS of a Meeting of the Cabinet held at 10 Downing Street, S.W. 1, on Monday, 18th March, 1946, at 11 a.m.

Present:

The Right Hon. C. R. ATTLEE, M.P., Prime Minister (in the Chair).

The Right Hon. HERBERT MORRISON, M.P., Lord President of the Council.

The Right Hon. ERNEST BEVIN, M.P., Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.

The Right Hon. HUGH DALTON, M.P., Chancellor of the Exchequer.


The Right Hon. J. CHUTER EDE, M.P., Secretary of State for the Home Department.

The Right Hon. LORD PETHICK-LAWRENCE, Secretary of State for India and Secretary of State for Burma.

The Right Hon. VISCOUNT STANSGATE, Secretary of State for Air.

The Right Hon. E. SHINWELL, M.P., Minister of Fuel and Power.

The Right Hon. ANEURIN BEVAN, M.P., Minister of Health.

The Right Hon. T. WILLIAMS, M.P., Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries.

The following were also present:

The Right Hon. JOHN WILMOT, M.P., Minister of Supply and of Aircraft Production (Items 9-10).

Mr. J. B. HYND, M.P., Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Item 11).

Mr. A. CREECH JONES, M.P., Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies (Item 12).

Mr. ORME SARGENT, Permanent Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.

Secretariat.

Sir EDWARD BRIDGES.

Sir NORMAN BROOK.

Mr. W. S. MURRIE.

Mr. C. G. EASTWOOD.
CABINET 25 (46).

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1. The Prime Minister recalled that at their meeting on the 11th March the Cabinet had invited him to consider whether further directions should be given to the Ministry of Information or its successor regarding its policy in handling speeches made by persons other than members of the Government. He and the Lord President had now considered this matter and had come to the conclusion that it would be inappropriate to issue any general directions. The point could best be dealt with on individual cases as they arose.

The Cabinet—

Took note, with approval, of the Prime Minister's statement.

2. The Lord President recalled the suggestion that the projected debate in the House of Commons on the World Food Situation might be held on the 25th March. From the point of view of economy in Parliamentary time, it would be convenient to hold the debate then, in connection with the remaining stages of the Consolidated Fund Bill. It had, however, been represented to him that the debate should not take place until the Minister of Food had returned from the United States.

The Prime Minister said that, according to his latest information, the Minister of Food should be back in this country before the end of the present week. The Minister would, however, wish to have an opportunity for consultation with the Cabinet before this debate took place; and it seemed preferable that the debate should not be held before the week beginning the 1st April.

The Cabinet—

Endorsed the Prime Minister's view that the House of Commons debate on the World Food Situation should not take place until some days after the Minister of Food had returned to this country from the United States.

3. The Foreign Secretary said that the United States Government had decided that they would bring the Persian situation before the Security Council if it was not raised by the Persian Government. They had reached, and published, this decision because they feared that pressure by the Soviet Government might prevent the Persian Government from raising the matter themselves. The latest indications were, however, that the Persian Government would bring the matter before the Security Council in spite of strong pressure by the Soviet Government to dissuade them from doing so.

The Foreign Secretary said that he had some reason to believe that the explanation of recent Soviet activities in Persia was to be sought in their oil interests, rather than a desire to acquire fresh territory or an outlet to warm-water ports. He had heard that if American oil companies obtained concessions in Persian Azerbaijan they might be able to draw oil away from the Russian oilfields at Baku. He would be grateful if the Minister of Fuel and Power would arrange for his technical experts to let him have a report on this point. The Minister of Fuel and Power undertook to do this.

The Cabinet—

Took note of the Foreign Secretary's statement.
4. The Foreign Secretary said that the Egyptian Government had appointed twelve persons to negotiate with His Majesty's Ambassador in Cairo the revision of the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty. These included no representative of the Wafd. It would, in his view, be inexpedient for us to question on this ground the competence of the negotiating body appointed by the Egyptian Government for an assurance that the negotiating body was sufficiently representative to warrant the assumption that a new Treaty negotiated after discussion with this body had a reasonable chance of being ratified by Egypt.

In discussion it was pointed out that it was unfortunate that representatives of the Wafd had not been included in the negotiating body, and this was likely to give rise to difficulty in the future. At the same time it was recognised that there were strong arguments against declining to negotiate with the body which the Egyptian Government had appointed for this purpose. We should not put ourselves in a position in which it could be said that we were willing to discuss Treaty revision only with a body of our own choosing.

The Cabinet—

Took note that His Majesty's Ambassador in Cairo would be authorised to open discussions about the revision of the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty with the negotiating body appointed for this purpose as soon as the Egyptian Government had given satisfactory assurances that this negotiating body was sufficiently representative to warrant the assumption that a new Treaty negotiated after discussion with them had a reasonable chance of being ratified by Egypt.

5. The Foreign Secretary said that it had now been agreed that the withdrawal of British and French troops from Syria would be completed by the 30th April, 1946. From the Lebanon the British troops could be withdrawn by June 1946, but the French Government claimed that they could not complete the withdrawal of their troops until a much later date. The Lebanese Government were dissatisfied with the position and proposed to bring the matter again to the Security Council.

The Foreign Secretary thought that the French were exaggerating the physical difficulties of completing their withdrawal from the Lebanon. In any event, it would be embarrassing for us to retain our troops there for longer than we needed, merely to ensure that our final withdrawal coincided with that of the French. He therefore proposed that final arrangements should now be made to withdraw our troops by the end of June.

The Cabinet—

Agreed that arrangements should be made to complete the withdrawal of British troops from the Lebanon by the end of June 1946.

6. The Foreign Secretary said that he had recently asked that the withdrawal of the remaining British troops from Denmark should be expedited; and this had enabled the Danish Government to inform the Soviet Government that all British troops would shortly be withdrawn from Danish territory. It was, he believed, as a result of this that the Soviet Government had now decided to withdraw their troops from the island of Bornholm. Their evacuation from Bornholm had already begun and was to be completed within a fortnight.
7. The Minister of Health called attention to the statement made by the Prime Minister of Greece that law and order, the necessary prerequisites for the holding of free elections, did not exist in Greece at the present time; that armed organisations were imposing their ideologies by violence; and that only monarchist candidates were able to move freely about the country. If we were to maintain our objection to any postponement of the elections, it seemed important that an early statement should be made explaining in some detail the steps which we had taken to ensure that the elections could be held in conditions which allowed the free expression of political opinion. Full publicity should be given to any such statement.

There was general agreement with this suggestion; and the Foreign Secretary undertook to take the first suitable opportunity for making a considered statement on this point.

8. The Cabinet considered a memorandum by the Foreign Secretary (C.P. (46) 111) proposing that we should now accede to the request of the Emperor of Ethiopia for the surrender of his son-in-law, Dejazmach Gugsa.

During the Battle of Makalle in 1935 Gugsa had gone over to the Italians by previous arrangement and had thereby contributed largely to the defeat of the Ethiopians. In 1941 the Emperor of Ethiopia had asked the British military authorities to surrender Gugsa; and the Minister of State in Cairo, on his own responsibility, had approved the advice of the Chief Political Officer, East African Command, that Gugsa should not be surrendered to the Emperor but should be deported. Gugsa was then given some form of assurance that he would not be handed over to the Emperor, and he was interned in the Seychelles, where he had since been living with ten relatives and retainers on a subsistence allowance paid by His Majesty’s Government. In 1942 the Emperor had renewed his application for Gugsa’s surrender and the matter had come before the War Cabinet, who decided that in view of the commitment entered into in the previous year Gugsa could not be surrendered. The Emperor had again renewed his application in October 1945; and had now instructed his Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs to raise the matter with the Foreign Office during his present visit to London.

The decision not to surrender Gugsa was not only bad in international law, but contrary to the general policy of handing over Quislings to the countries they had sought to betray. On the other hand, we had given our word to Gugsa that he would not be surrendered; and to give him up now would involve going back on the assurance given to him and on the decisions taken by the War Cabinet in 1942. The Foreign Secretary recommended nevertheless that Gugsa should now be surrendered to the Emperor.

Discussion showed that it was the view of the Cabinet that, on the merits, Gugsa ought to be surrendered to the Emperor. The only question was whether the present Government were committed by the assurances given to him on the authority of the Minister of State, then a member of the War Cabinet, and by the War Cabinet’s subsequent decision in 1942 that these assurances should be honoured. Some Ministers were apprehensive that a decision to go back on these assurances now might be thought to imply some derogation from the right of asylum. As against this, it was pointed out that the document signed by Gugsa in 1941 included the statement—“I understand that I shall be paid a subsistence allowance until the end of the war when my position will be reviewed.” It was arguable that this reference to a review extended, not merely to the payment of the subsistence allowance, but to the case as a whole.

The conclusion of the Cabinet was that, despite the assurances given to Gugsa in 1941, the right course now was to surrender him to the Emperor.
The Cabinet—

(1) Agreed in principle that Gugsa should be surrendered to the Emperor of Ethiopia.

(2) Took note that, before any communication was made to the Ethiopian representative in London, the Foreign Secretary would consult with Mr. Anthony Eden, who had been Foreign Secretary when these assurances were given to Gugsa in 1941 and when the matter came before the War Cabinet in 1942.

9. The Cabinet considered a memorandum by the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs (C.P. 46) 99) reporting the conclusions of the Civil Aviation Committee on proposals made by the Minister of Supply and of Aircraft Production for the provision of facilities at Filton Airfield for the construction of prototypes of the Brabazon I aircraft.

The Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs said that authority for the design and construction of two prototypes of this aircraft had been given by the War Cabinet in December 1943 (W.M. 43) 167th Conclusions, Minute 2) and that in June 1945 the Cabinet had authorised the then Minister of Aircraft Production to start work on the construction of an assembly and flight-testing shed, on the understanding that the expenditure to be incurred would not exceed £50,000. Authority was now sought for the acquisition of 180 acres of land for the construction of an extended runway, and for the completion of the assembly building and flight shed. The total cost of the project, including the construction of airframes and engines, would be £7,535,250. The first aircraft to be produced (the Mark I) would be powered with Centaurus reciprocating engines, and would be followed by three Mark II aircraft with Proteus gas turbines. B.O.A.C. were prepared to give orders for the Mark II aircraft, but they did not regard the Mark I type as a satisfactory aircraft for its intended purpose; and the Committee had formed the impression that the Ministry of Civil Aviation did not regard either type of the Brabazon I with great enthusiasm. If, therefore, the matter had had to be determined solely on the operator's opinion, the Committee would have had some hesitation in recommending that the project should proceed. They had felt, however, that, in view of the great experience in aeronautical knowledge which would be gained from the development of the Brabazon I aircraft, in the field of both civil and military aviation, the project should be carried out. Work must start at once on the extension of the existing runway at Filton if it was to be completed by the time the Mark I prototype was ready to begin its flight trials in May 1947. The Committee therefore endorsed the proposal of the Minister of Supply and of Aircraft Production that the land needed for this extension of the runway should be acquired by the exercise of his existing powers under the Defence Acts.

The Committee had also given some consideration to the proposal that Filton should be used as a civil airport for Bristol. Additional runways and terminal buildings and hangars would be required for this purpose, and the Minister of Civil Aviation would have to acquire up to 520 acres of land in addition to the 180 acres required for the main runway. At first sight this seemed an economical proposition, but the details were being considered further by the Ministry of Civil Aviation in consultation with the Treasury and other Departments concerned.

The Cabinet first considered whether the main project should go forward.

The Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Civil Aviation, said that, although B.O.A.C. were not interested in the Mark I type of the Brabazon I aircraft, they had agreed that orders on their behalf should be placed for three Mark II types. Their lack
of enthusiasm for this aircraft was partly due to their belief that by 1950, when it was likely to come into operation, other improved types might be available. The Minister of Civil Aviation himself, however, definitely supported the view that the project should go on.

The President of the Board of Trade said that the Brabazon I aircraft was likely to be as good as any of the competing United States aircraft which were now being produced. If we were to achieve a competitive position in civil aircraft design, it was essential that this project should go forward.

The Cabinet next considered by what powers the land should be acquired for the extended runway and for the possible provision of the main Bristol airport at Filton.

The Minister of Supply and of Aircraft Production pointed out that, as work on the runway must begin at once, he must proceed under the powers contained in the Defence Acts, 1842 to 1935, which had been conferred on him by the Ministry of Supply Act, 1899, and had been made available for purposes such as the present by the Supplies and Services (Transitional Powers) Act, 1945.

There was general agreement that the land required for the runway should be acquired under the powers contained in the Defence Acts. It was, however, desirable to avoid introducing fresh legislation to authorise the acquisition of additional land for developing the Filton site as the main Bristol airport. The Minister of Supply and of Aircraft Production should consult with the Minister of Health and the Minister of Civil Aviation with a view to ensuring that the powers required for this purpose were taken in the Civil Aviation Bill and, if necessary, in the Acquisition of Land (Authorisation Procedure) Bill.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer said that approval of the project for the extension of the runway should not be regarded as committing the Government finally to the plan for establishing the main Bristol Civil airport at Filton. This plan required further consideration between the Departments concerned. This was agreed.

The Cabinet—

(1) Agreed that the project for the construction of the Brabazon I aircraft should proceed.

(2) Approved the extension of the main runway and the construction of an assembly building and flight shed at Filton on the lines proposed in C.P. (46) 99.

(3) Agreed that the land required for the extension of the runway should be acquired under the Defence Acts, 1842–1935.

(4) Invited the Minister of Supply and of Aircraft Production to consult with the Minister of Health and the Minister of Civil Aviation with a view to ensuring that any further powers needed for acquiring additional land for developing the Filton site as the main Bristol airport were included in the Civil Aviation Bill and, if necessary, in the Acquisition of Land (Authorisation Procedure) Bill.

10. The Cabinet had before them (i) a memorandum by the Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Civil Aviation (C.P. (46) 110), covering a draft of the Civil Aviation Bill; and (ii) a memorandum by the President of the Board of Trade (C.P. (46) 113) raising objections to Clause 4 (1) of the Bill, which prohibited the Airways Corporations from using aircraft, components, accessories or equipment designed or manufactured outside His Majesty's dominions, except with the approval of the Minister or under any general authority given by him.
Discussion first turned on the objections of the President of the Board of Trade to Clause 4 (1) of the Bill.

The Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Civil Aviation, said that this Clause was based on a similar provision in the British Overseas Airways Act, 1939. If, however, the Cabinet decided to sustain the objections raised by the President of the Board of Trade, the best course would be to omit Clause 4 (1) and rely on the general powers conferred on the Minister by Clause 3 (2) to give directions to the Corporations as to the exercise of their functions.

The Foreign Secretary supported the proposal of the President of the Board of Trade that the Bill should not in terms prohibit the use of foreign aircraft, accessories or equipment. Any such prohibition might react unfavourably on our ability to sell such products as locomotives and ships to foreign countries.

The Minister of Supply and of Aircraft Production said that while he would not object either to the suggestion that Clause 4 (1) should be omitted, reliance being placed on the powers of the Minister under Clause 3, or to the proposal that Clause 4 (1) should be redrafted in the terms of the Annex to C.P. (46) 113, he hoped that there would be no departure from the agreement reached by the Lord President's Committee on the 26th January (L.P. (46) 3rd Meeting, Minute 2) that the manufacture of aircraft or parts of aircraft and the carrying out of major repairs by the Corporations should be subject to the consent of the Minister. This control was essential for the purpose of maintaining the efficiency of the aircraft industry in this country, and this, in turn, was essential for the maintenance of our war potential.

In further discussion it was urged, on the one hand, that Clause 3 gave the Minister all the necessary powers to secure the objects of Clause 4 (1), and that the proper course was to omit Clause 4 (1). On the other hand, it was argued that, if reliance was placed entirely on the powers of the Minister under Clause 3, difficult questions might arise, both when the Bill was before Parliament and in actual administration, as to the precise control exercisable by the Minister over the Corporations.

The Prime Minister said that the general sense of the Cabinet was against the retention of Clause 4 (1). The question whether, if Clause 4 (1) were omitted from the Bill, reliance could be placed on the powers in Clause 3 or whether some alternative provision on the lines of the draft in the Annex to C.P. (46) 113 should be substituted for Clause 4 (1) should be considered by the Minister of Civil Aviation in consultation with the Minister of Supply and of Aircraft Production before the meeting of the Legislation Committee on the following day.

Other points in discussion were:

(a) It was suggested that the detailed statement of the powers of the three Corporations should be transferred from Clause 2 of the Bill to a Schedule.

(b) The Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Civil Aviation, undertook, with reference to Clause 32, to see that the powers of the Minister to replace buildings extended to farm buildings as well as houses.

(c) The Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs asked whether it was right that the duty under Clause 32 to provide alternative accommodation should be limited to cases in which it appeared to the Minister of Civil Aviation to be desirable to do so. It was agreed that this point could be considered by the Legislation Committee.
The Cabinet—

(1) Agreed that Clause 4 (1) of the draft Bill should be omitted and invited the Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Civil Aviation, to consider, in consultation with the Minister of Supply and of Aircraft Production, what, if any, alternative provision should be inserted in the Bill to give to the Minister of Civil Aviation control over the use by the Corporations of foreign aircraft, accessories or equipment.

(2) Approved the draft Civil Aviation Bill annexed to C.P. (46) 110, subject to the preceding conclusion and to detailed examination by the Legislation Committee.

11. The Cabinet had before them (i) a note by the Foreign Secretary (C.P. (46) 114) covering a memorandum by the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster on the future level of Germany's industrial production; and (ii) a further memorandum by the Foreign Secretary (C.P. (46) 115) outlining the instructions which should be sent to our representatives at the forthcoming discussion of this question on the Allied Control Council in Berlin.

In the memorandum by the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster it was recalled that it had been agreed at Yalta and Potsdam that the plan for extracting reparations from Germany should be so designed that Germany would be left with sufficient resources to subsist without external assistance at an average living standard not exceeding that of European countries other than the United Kingdom and Russia. Discussions had been started in Berlin to determine the level of industry which Germany should be permitted to retain, but they had for a long time made little progress. Eventually, on the 31st December, 1945, a plan had been put forward by the United Kingdom Delegation to the Allied Co-ordinating Committee. This plan, although it was the least drastic plan that seemed possible under the Potsdam Agreement, already involved so serious an interference with the German economy as to cause Ministers much uneasiness. It had, however, been regarded as too lenient by our Allies. A revised plan had now been submitted to the Control Council by the Allied Economic Directorate. This had been accepted by the American and Soviet representatives on behalf of their Governments, and the British and French representatives had undertaken to obtain the views of their Governments by the 20th March. The new plan was described in C.P. (46) 114. It represented concessions by both sides, but in nearly every case the Russian concessions had been substantially greater than those of the other Powers. In the view of the British delegation the plan represented a fair interpretation of the Potsdam Agreement. A substantially more lenient attitude toward Germany could not be adopted without modification of that Agreement. While the new plan had many disadvantages, its acceptance would remove a source of irritation which had clouded relations in Berlin and might pave the way to a better understanding.

The Foreign Secretary's memorandum (C.P. (46) 115) suggested that the British Delegation should be authorised to accept the new plan on certain assumptions. These were:

(i) That Germany, with its present Western frontiers remaining unchanged, would be treated as a single economic whole; and that, in the event of any alteration in the Western frontiers or of a decision against a centralised economic administration, the plan would call for revision.

(ii) That the population of Germany would not exceed 66½ millions.
(iii) That exports would be possible to pay for imports to the extent envisaged in the plan, thus obviating a charge on the occupying Powers or other external assistance.

Our representatives should insist that the situation in Germany should be reviewed periodically with the above assumptions in mind and that there should simultaneously be reviews of the extent to which the measures taken to ensure elimination of the German war potential had been effective. They should stress the importance of encouraging agriculture and other peaceful industries; and should recommend the modification or removal in due course of any limitations inherent in this plan on the expansion of peaceful industries, subject always to the requirements of essential security. Finally, they should make it clear that acceptance of the above conditions for the review and possible modification of the plan need not affect immediate action for determining the amount of equipment to be removed from Germany as reparations.

The Foreign Secretary said that these proposals for a review were necessary to ensure that a balance of payments could, in fact, be achieved, and that a continuing burden was not imposed on the British taxpayer. The British Exchequer was now contributing some £80 to £90 million a year. He estimated that, if this plan were accepted, the cost in two or three years' time should be reduced to about £25 million.

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster recommended the acceptance of the plan in the terms proposed, despite its many disadvantages. He called the attention of the Cabinet to the fact that the plan foreshadowed unemployment of the order of 4–4½ million in Germany. The level of industry proposed was that of 1932, which had produced the conditions in which Hitler had risen to power. The British Zone, as the most highly industrialised zone, would have to bear the main burden of this unemployment. This made it the more urgent to establish a central German Administration so that the British Zone could obtain relief from the agricultural production of the other zones.

The Lord President said that, while it might be necessary to accept the plan as a working principle for the present, he was much concerned at the prospect that it held out. We seemed to be heading for economic chaos in Germany which would injure our own economic interests. While we should prevent the rebuilding of a war potential in Germany, it was not good policy to ruin the German economy. A population of this size could not be reduced to a pastoral condition. To keep in force a plan which foreshadowed so large a figure of unemployment seemed to be inviting a repetition of the events which led to the break-up of the Weimar Republic.

There was general agreement with these views. At the same time, the plan, with all its disadvantages, would at least afford an agreed basis on which to start. The course of events might make possible its early revision and, if so, revision would begin from a better starting point than had at one time seemed possible.

In further discussion the question was raised of obtaining further supplies of timber and potash from Germany. The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster said that this was under consideration.

The Cabinet—

Agreed that the British representatives on the Allied Control Council in Berlin should be authorised to accept the plan outlined in C.P. (46) 114 subject to the reservations set out in C.P. (46) 115 and summarised above.
12. The Cabinet had before them a memorandum by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies (C.P. (46) 112) covering a revised draft of a treaty with Transjordan.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies said that negotiations with the Transjordan delegation had proceeded in an atmosphere of great cordiality. The draft now before the Cabinet followed the main lines of that which they had approved on the 28th February. It had received the approval of the Foreign Office, the Board of Trade, the Treasury and the Chiefs of Staff.

After discussion the Cabinet—

Approved the conclusion of a treaty with the Transjordan Government in the terms of the draft attached to C.P. (46) 112, subject to consideration by the Secretary of State for the Colonies of some minor points raised in the discussion.

13. The Prime Minister said that the members of the Cabinet Mission to India would be leaving for India on the following day. The Cabinet took farewell of the members of the mission and extended to them their best wishes for success in the difficult task which lay before them.

Cabinet Office, S.W. 1,
18th March, 1946.