CONCLUSIONS of a Meeting of the Cabinet held in the Prime Minister's Room, House of Commons, S.W. 1, on Friday, 7th February, 1947, at 11 a.m.

Present:
The Right Hon. C. R. Attlee, M.P., Prime Minister (in the Chair).
The Right Hon. Ernest Bevin, M.P., Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.
The Right Hon. A. V. Alexander, M.P., Minister of Defence.
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. Aneurin Bevan, M.P., Minister of Health.
The Right Hon. Sir Stafford Cripps, K.C., M.P., President of the Board of Trade.
The Right Hon. Viscount Jowitt, Lord Chancellor.
The Right Hon. Viscount Addison, Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs.
The Right Hon. A. Creech Jones, M.P., Secretary of State for the Colonies.
The Right Hon. E. Shinwell, M.P., Minister of Fuel and Power.
The Right Hon. T. Williams, M.P., Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries.

The following were also present:
The Right Hon. John Strachey, M.P., Minister of Food.

Secretariat.
Sir Norman Brook.
Mr. C. G. Eastwood.
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Power Stations.

1. The Minister of Fuel and Power said that since the Cabinet's meeting on the previous day he had given further consideration to the problem of keeping the power stations in operation notwithstanding the interruption of coal supplies on account of the severe weather. He was now satisfied that, despite the emergency measures which were being taken to increase the amount of coal available in the South, the weather was interfering with both the production and the transport of coal to such an extent that drastic cuts in electricity supplies were inevitable. He had considered whether it would be enough to confine the cuts to two days a week or to domestic consumption alone; but he was satisfied that the economies to be secured by these means would not be sufficient. Cuts in industrial supplies were inevitable; but he had ascertained that selective cuts would to some extent be practicable —as a result of their experience in shedding the load, power stations would be able to reduce industrial supplies without interfering with the more essential services.

The Minister therefore proposed that a public statement should at once be made to the effect that in the London and South-Eastern area, in North-West England and in the Midlands, a number of power stations must cease generating electricity owing to shortage of coal and draw their supplies from the Grid, and that drastic reductions must be made in the consumption of electricity in these areas. It would therefore be necessary that in these areas all supplies of electricity should be cut off from industrial consumers, though arrangements would be made to maintain supplies for certain essential services and, for factories operating continuous processes, to continue sufficient supplies to prevent damage to plant. Supplies to domestic consumers would be cut off, in the same areas, from 9 a.m. to 12 noon and from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m., and similar cuts would be applied to theatres and cinemas.

The Minister proposed that these restrictions should come into effect on the morning of Sunday, 9th February. They might last from three to seven days.

In discussion the following points were made:—

(a) Would electric light, as well as power, be cut off from industry? Some factories using coal for power would be able to carry on if supplies of electricity for lighting were not withdrawn.

The Minister of Fuel and Power undertook to consider whether in such cases electricity supplies for lighting could be maintained.

(b) Was it necessary that these restrictions should be introduced on Sunday morning? This would cause grave inconvenience to domestic consumers and, as the industrial load was light on Sundays, it was doubtful whether any substantial saving would be secured.

The Cabinet agreed that the restrictions should begin on the morning of Monday, 10th February.

(c) In order that firms might know where they stood, it would be preferable to announce at the outset that the restrictions would last for at least a week.

The Cabinet—

(I) Agreed that cuts must be made in electricity supplies on the basis proposed by the Minister of Fuel and Power, subject to the points noted in paragraphs (a)-(c) above; and—

took note that the Minister of Fuel and Power would make an announcement to this effect in the debate which was taking place in the House of Commons that day.

The Minister of Transport recalled that at the Cabinet's meeting on the previous day he had undertaken to consider whether it would be possible to divert bunker coal to home consumption. Consultations had taken place between officials of his Department and the Ministry of Fuel and Power...
and a large measure of agreement had been reached. On the previous evening, however, the Minister of Fuel and Power, without further consultation with him, had given instructions that all loading of coal into British and foreign ships proceeding overseas should cease. As a result, between 30 and 40 ships were immobilised for the sake of about 40,000 tons of coal; and grave anxiety had been caused in shipping circles. This embargo, if it were maintained for more than a few days, must gravely prejudice our prospects of maintaining supplies of food-stuffs and other essential imports.

The Minister asked that the embargo on the bunkering of British ships proceeding overseas should at once be withdrawn. He asked that no general ruling should be given on the question whether bunker coal should be provided for foreign ships wishing to leave United Kingdom ports or for the supply of coaling stations abroad. These matters for detailed discussion between his Department and the Ministry of Fuel and Power.

After a short discussion, the Cabinet—

(2) Asked the Minister of Fuel and Power to withdraw the embargo on the bunkering of British ships leaving United Kingdom ports.

(3) Invited the Minister of Transport and the Minister of Fuel and Power to arrange for officials of their Departments to determine in what circumstances bunker coal should be provided, in the present emergency, for foreign ships desiring to leave United Kingdom ports and for coaling stations abroad; and agreed that the Ministry of Food should be represented at these discussions.

The Cabinet were informed that steps had already been taken to suspend the export of coal to foreign countries.

The Cabinet—

(4) Confirmed the decision that coal exports should be suspended during the present emergency.

2. The Cabinet considered a joint memorandum by the Foreign Secretary and the Secretary of State for the Colonies (C.P. (47) 49) reporting the progress of the discussions with Arab and Jewish representatives about the future of Palestine, and seeking authority to put before them as a basis for further negotiation the fresh proposals outlined in the Appendix to the memorandum.

The Foreign Secretary said that it was clear from the discussions that the Arabs were implacably opposed to Partition. Apart from their position, there would be grave practical difficulties in giving effect to Partition; and it was also doubtful whether any scheme of Partition which would be acceptable to the Jews would be regarded by His Majesty's Government as defensible. The Arabs also demanded that there should be no further Jewish immigration into Palestine; but on this point there should be some room for compromise if means could be found of allaying the Arab fears that, by immigration, the Jews would achieve a numerical majority in Palestine.

The Jews claimed that the Balfour Declaration and the Mandate implied a promise that a Jewish State would be established in the whole of Palestine. They were willing to consider as a compromise the creation of "a viable Jewish State in an adequate area of Palestine." The essential point of principle for the Jews was the creation of a sovereign Jewish State.

In these circumstances the Colonial Secretary and he had tried to find a solution which, even though it were not accepted by either community, was one which His Majesty's Government could conscientiously support and in which the two communities might finally acquiesce. They now sought authority to put before the Arabs and
the Jews the plan outlined in the Appendix to C.P. (47) 49. This had as its primary object the establishment of self-government in Palestine leading to independence after a transition period of five years under Trusteeship. It provided for a substantial measure of local autonomy in Arab and Jewish areas, and enabled Arabs and Jews to collaborate together at the centre. It contained special safeguards for the "human rights" of the two communities. It provided for the admission of 100,000 Jewish immigrants over the next two years and for continued immigration thereafter by agreement between the two communities or, failing that, by arbitration under the United Nations. The plan incorporated features of many earlier schemes. It was consistent with the Mandate and, if it commanded a reasonable measure of acquiescence from either of the two communities, it could be set on foot at once and regularised subsequently by a Trusteeship Agreement.

If it were found that a plan on these lines was likely to command such a measure of acquiescence, the Cabinet would be asked to decide whether His Majesty's Government should go ahead with it. If on the other hand there was no prospect of acquiescence, it would then be necessary to submit the whole problem to the United Nations, explaining the various efforts which had been made to find a solution but making no recommendations.

The Foreign Secretary said that he thought it most desirable that the negotiations should not be allowed to come to an end at this point. Hitherto, neither side had been prepared to discuss in a rational spirit any plan that had a chance of acceptance by the other side. In the last two days, however, there had been some signs of a more accommodating spirit; and there was every advantage in continuing by patient endeavours over the next few days to seek a basis for detailed discussion of a practical plan.

The Secretary of State for the Colonies said that he had previously thought that Partition afforded the only way out of the present deadlock in Palestine; and he had been confirmed in that opinion by the views expressed to him by the High Commissioner and by his advisers in the Colonial Office. He confessed, however, that the longer he had examined the detailed implications of Partition, the more he was impressed by its practical difficulties. It would be very difficult to establish a viable Jewish State without prejudicing the vital interests of the Palestine Arabs; and wherever the frontiers were drawn, large numbers of Arabs must inevitably be left under Jewish rule. He was also impressed by the difficulties of securing the assent of the United Nations to a scheme of Partition. But perhaps the greatest difficulty of all was that the enforcement of Partition was, he was now convinced, bound to involve conditions of rebellion and disorder in Palestine which might last for a considerable time and would involve a substantial military commitment for us.

He was therefore in full agreement with the proposals in C.P. (47) 49, which had been explained to the Cabinet by the Foreign Secretary. He believed that these proposals would go some way to meet the Jewish point of view on immigration and on land transfer. There were signs of some division of opinion among the leaders of the Jewish Agency, and some elements in the Jewish community both here and in the United States considered that the Agency's demands were too extreme. He therefore hoped that the Jews might regard this plan as one which they were prepared to discuss.

On the strategic implications of this plan, the Minister of Defence suggested that it would be mistaken to set a limit of five years for the period of Trusteeship. Even if both communities acquiesced in the scheme, it was doubtful whether in five years we could produce in Palestine a stable State ready for independence. The Chiefs of Staff were much concerned at this time-limit, for there could be no certainty that we should be able to maintain a military base in Palestine thereafter, and this was essential for the defence of our interests in the Middle East as a whole. It was therefore suggested that the period proposed should be increased to ten years.
or, alternatively, that we should not do more than promise that the continuance of the Trusteeship should be reviewed after five years.

The general view of the Cabinet was, however, that unless we now proposed a definite and relatively short period of Trusteeship we should be unable to convince the two communities that we were sincere in our intention to enable Palestine to achieve independence. Moreover, the knowledge that the period of Trusteeship was to be relatively short would provide both communities with the necessary incentive to collaborate with one another. As to our strategic needs, we must in any event rely on a military Alliance with an independent State when the period of Trusteeship ended; and there was no reason to suppose that this need be more difficult to obtain in Palestine than it had been in Iraq and Transjordan.

It was pointed out that the proposals now put forward were based on the hope that Jews and Arabs would collaborate in a unitary State. This had been the foundation of our policy for many years, but no signs had been forthcoming of any readiness to collaborate. Would this fresh attempt to secure collaboration meet with any more success?

The general view of Ministers was that, nevertheless, there was every advantage in putting forward these proposals to both parties as a basis for negotiation. The results of the further discussions should be reported to the Cabinet. It was also agreed that these negotiations must be brought to a point within the next week or so. If there was no measure of acquiescence in the proposals, then it seemed that reference to the United Nations would be necessary.

The Cabinet—

(1) Authorised the Foreign Secretary and the Secretary of State for the Colonies to put before the representatives of the Arabs and the Jews the proposals outlined in the Appendix to C.P. (47) 49 on the understanding that, if an agreement were reached on this basis, His Majesty’s Government would proceed to give effect to it.

(2) Took note that, if in these further discussions no agreement were reached, the Foreign Secretary and the Colonial Secretary would report to the Cabinet whether in their judgment these proposals were likely to meet with any substantial measure of acquiescence from either of the two communities in Palestine, and would then invite the Cabinet to decide whether His Majesty’s Government would be justified in bringing the scheme into operation on their own authority pending the negotiation of a Trusteeship Agreement.

Cabinet Office, S.W. 1,
7th February, 1947.