CONCLUSIONS of a Meeting of the Cabinet held at 10, Downing Street, S.W.I., on SUNDAY, May 2nd, 1926, at 12 Noon.

PRESENT:  

The Right Hon. Stanley Baldwin, M.P., Prime Minister (In the Chair).


THE FOLLOWING WERE ALSO PRESENT:


P.A. Hankey, G.C.B. ................. Secretary.
1. The Prime Minister gave the Cabinet particulars as to the latest developments in the Coal Dispute, beginning at the point on Friday evening when the negotiations between the Government on one side, and the representatives of the Trades Union Congress and the Miners on the other side, had broken down owing to the refusal of the Miners' leaders (notwithstanding the efforts of the Trades Union Congress representatives to find a formula) to commit themselves to agreement in the Report of the Coal Commission on the Coal Industry.

On the next day (Saturday, May 1st.) the Government had received two letters from the Trades Union Congress General Council. The first stated that the Executive Committees of the Trades Unions affiliated to the Trades Union Congress, including the Miners' Federation of Great Britain, had decided to hand over to the General Council of the Trades Union Congress the conduct of the dispute, and added that the General Council held themselves available if the Government wished to discuss the matter further. (Appendix I).

The second letter offered, in the event of a general strike in support of the Miners, to enter into arrangements for the distribution of essential foodstuffs. (Appendix II.)

After some discussions between the Government representatives and the General Council of the Trades Union Congress, it had been agreed that conversations of an informal character and of which no stenographic note
As to be taken, should take place between three representatives of either side. The object of these conversations was to explore the possibility of finding some basis for negotiation, but the results were to be entirely non-committal. These conversations had continued until the early hours of this morning. Shortly before the end, during an adjournment, Sir Horace Wilson had had a conversation with the Trades Union representatives, as a result of which, the latter had stated that their position would be correctly indicated by a statement on the following lines:—

1.15 a.m.
2nd May, 1926.

The Prime Minister has satisfied himself, as a result of the conversations he has had with the representatives of the T.U.C. that, if negotiations are continued (it being understood that the notices cease to be operative) the representatives of the T.U.C. are confident that a settlement can be reached on the lines of the Report within a fortnight.

10, Downing Street, S.W.1.

The words "Prime Minister" in the above formula of course include his colleagues, the Secretary of State for India and the Minister of Labour, who acquiesced.

Sir Horace Wilson had received an assurance that this formula was intended to mean that, if negotiations were continued, in the view of the T.U.C. representatives the Miners' representatives would agree to negotiate on the basis of the Report of the Royal Commission, recognising that this meant accepting a reduction of wages.

When the Prime Minister gave them a copy of the statement Mr. Thomas said that he and his colleagues would not give the Prime Minister and his colleagues a reply until they had consulted with the T.U.C.'s full Committee and with the Miners and if they came back accepting the statement they would come authorised by the Miners to say on their behalf that the Miners accepted the Report, recognising that this meant accepting a reduction of wages.
The representatives of the Government then agreed that the representatives of the Trades Union Council should consult their Executive Committee, including the Miners, in regard to this formula, and should return the reply in the course of the day. The proposal was that if the formula should eventually result in a resumption of negotiations, these should be entrusted to a small Committee, composed, so far as the Government were concerned, of the Secretary of State for India, the Minister of Labour and the Minister of Mines, who would confer with representatives of the Trades Union Council, both sides accompanied by experts. This would free the Prime Minister to deal with the situation as a whole including his Parliamentary responsibilities.

After a statement by the Secretary of State for India, in support of the Prime Minister's remarks, a general discussion took place. The general view of the Cabinet was that the above formula was too vague and indefinite, and gave no assurance that the proposed negotiations were likely to lead to a successful issue; and that taken in conjunction with the menace of a general strike, it would be regarded by public opinion as a yielding by the Government to threats. It was felt that negotiations involving the payment of a subsidy ought not to be resumed without a definite answer from the Miners in regard to their acceptance of the Report of the Royal Commission, which, of course, would commit...
the Miners to make some sacrifice as indicated in that Report.

It was assumed that in any event the complete withdrawal of the threat of a general strike was sine qua non to any resumption of negotiations involving a subsidy.

As regards the letter in Appendix II, the general opinion of the Cabinet was that it should either not be answered at all, or else a very stiff reply should be sent. Suggestions were made that in the event of a general strike, legislation should at once be introduced, either to make a secret ballot necessary, and/or that in the event of a sympathetic general strike, as now contemplated, legislation should be introduced to remove the immunity in such cases of strike funds, and to make picketing illegal.

The subject was adjourned, pending the receipt of the reply from the Trades Union Council, and the Prime Minister asked the Cabinet to meet again at 4 p.m. (subsequently adjourned to 5 p.m. owing to the receipt of a communication that the Trades Union Council could not reply until after 4 p.m.)
2. The Cabinet had a short discussion in regard to the present position of the Supply and Transport organisation. The Postmaster General informed the Cabinet that no local difficulties had, as yet, arisen. The representatives of the Trades Union Council had informed the Prime Minister and his colleagues on the previous day that they had as yet passed no formal resolution in favour of a general strike, but the Postmaster General stated that he had information that telegrams calling for the cessation of work had been sent to the railway men, the transport workers, the railway clerks and the iron and steel workers.

The general feeling of the Cabinet was that the dispatch of these telegrams constituted a new factor, which had an important bearing on the discussion referred to in Conclusion 1.

The Cabinet agreed:

(a) That the Postmaster General, as Chief Civil Commissioner, should communicate to the Prime Minister copies of the telegrams which had been sent by the Trades Unions in connection with the order for a general strike;

(b) That the Chief Civil Commissioner should consult the Cabinet again later in the day as to any further instructions he required.

2, Whitehall Gardens, S.W.1.

2nd May, 1926.
APPENDIX I.

THE TRADES UNION CONGRESS GENERAL COUNCIL,
32, Bishopston Square,
LONDON, S.W. 1.

1st May, 1926.

The Rt. Hon Stanley Baldwin, M.P.,
10, Downing Street,
Whitehall, S.W. 1.

Dear Sir,

Mining Lock-out.

I have to advise you that the Executive Committees of the Trade Unions affiliated to the Trades Union Congress, including the Miners' Federation of Great Britain, have decided to hand over to the General Council of the Trades Union Congress the conduct of the dispute; and the negotiations in connection therewith will be undertaken by the General Council.

I am directed to say that the General Council will hold themselves available at any moment should the Government desire to discuss the matter further.

Yours faithfully,

(Signed) WALTER M. OITRINE

Acting Secretary.
APPENDIX II.

THE TRADES UNION CONGRESS GENERAL COUNCIL,
32, Holleston Square,
S.W. 1.

1st May, 1926.

Sir,

Mining Lock-out - Essential Food-stuffs.

I am directed to inform you that in the event of the strike of Unions affiliated to the Trades Union Congress being place in support of the Miners, who have been locked out, the General Council is prepared to enter into arrangements for the distribution of essential food-stuffs.

Should the Government desire to discuss the matter with the General Council they are available for that purpose.

The General Council will be glad to learn your wishes in this respect.

Yours faithfully,

WALTER M. CUTHINE.

Acting Secretary.