I circulate for the consideration of my colleagues the accompanying Conclusions of the Emergency Committee appointed by the Cabinet at their Meeting on February 12th, 1924, for the purpose of enquiring into the emergency organization in the event of an industrial crisis (Reference Cabinet 12(24), Conclusion 4(b)).

(Intd.) A.H.

Home Office,
February 13th, 1924.
CABINET.

SUPPLY AND TRANSPORT ORGANISATION.

EMERGENCY COMMITTEE.

Conclusions of a meeting held in the Home Secretary's Room, Home Office, on Tuesday, February 12th, at 6 p.m.

PRESENT:

The Rt. Hon. Sidney Webb, M.P., President, Board of Trade.
The Rt. Hon. W. Adamson, Secretary for Scotland.
Mr. H. Cosling, C.H., M.P., Minister of Transport.

The following were also present:
Mr. K. Lyon, O.B.E., War Office.
Mr. P. J. G. Rose, Scottish Office.
Mr. H. A. Payne, C.B., Board of Trade.
Mr. C. F. Roundell, C.B.E.

Mr. O. Longhurst, C.B. . Secretary.
The Committee, which was appointed at a meeting of the Cabinet held in the morning of the same day, had before them the attached Report of Sir John Anderson's Committee on the Future of the Supply and Transport Organisation (Cabinet Paper C.P.314(23) dated 5th July, 1923).

After hearing a brief explanation by Sir John Anderson of the scheme of organisation set out in the Report, the Committee agreed:

To recommend the Cabinet to adopt the scheme which, if adopted, involved the immediate appointment of a Chief Civil Commissioner.

2, Whitehall Gardens,
12th February, 1924.
During the industrial unrest and grave strikes of 1919-21 a special Government organization was evolved to deal with the preparation and operation of schemes for maintaining the supply of essentials of life to the community, and to deal generally with the situation, during strikes, lock-outs and similar emergencies. It consisted of a special Committee of the Cabinet, known as the Supply and Transport Committee, with numerous Sub-Committees directing and coordinating particular branches of activity, and, dovetailed in with these, an organization formerly known as the "Supply Department", with headquarters in Whitehall Gardens, consisting, under a Chief Civil Commissioner in London, of eleven members of the Government assisted by General Inspectors of the Ministry of Health as Chiefs of Staff, a division of England and Wales being allocated to each (Scotland having a somewhat similar organization under the Scottish Office), and their functions being to supervise and coordinate activities, particularly recruiting of labour, in their areas and generally to act as principal Government representative on the spot.

This organization has not been reviewed since the new Government took office. Moreover changes affecting its construction have taken place during the last two or three years, particularly the disappearance of wartime personnel and the progressive reversion to pre-war Government machinery and Departmental responsibility (including the retrenchment of the functions of the Cabinet Secretariat). It therefore appeared to be desirable, even though no grave emergency might be immediately anticipated, to review the situation and to consider what should be the outlines of the organization, if any, now to be established. The Prime Minister accordingly approved a suggestion that an ad hoc conference of Departmental representatives should examine the problem fully in the light of present conditions (C.P.314/23). The present report contains the recommendations agreed upon at successive meetings of this conference.

1. We are clearly of opinion that, if only as a preventive measure, the Government should have ready prepared plans for dealing with emergencies of the kind indicated in the Emergency Powers Act, 1920, i.e., emergencies "calculated ....... to deprive ....... any substantial proportion of the community of the essentials of life". Effective plans on a sufficiently comprehensive scale do not now exist, the previously adopted having become to a considerable extent obsolete owing to the disappearance of war-time arrangements in the last two or three years. An organization on the lines indicated below should therefore be established now, to stimulate and assist Departments to prepare such plans.
2. The general direction of special Government arrangements for dealing with emergencies of the kind indicated, and of the planning of such arrangements in advance, should be specifically entrusted to an ad hoc Committee of the Cabinet consisting of the Ministers mainly concerned with the Home Secretary or some other Cabinet Minister in the Chair, (see also recommendation 13).

3. Under this Committee some special coordinating machinery will be necessary, and this is discussed later, but we wish to state at the outset that we think it undesirable to continue or re-create more exceptional bodies than absolutely necessary. Practically all the special wartime organization material and personnel on which the Government largely relied in past strikes, particularly the Railway Strike of 1919, has disappeared. We desire therefore to re-affirm the underlying principle that each of the Government Departments must be responsible within the limits of its available resources for seeing that such arrangements as are possible are made for dealing with the emergency situation so far as it may be affected by matters within the sphere of that Department. For example, the Board of Trade will be responsible for the arrangements to ensure that adequate supplies of food, coal, gas and other commodities necessary to the community are available for distribution, and for collecting information regarding such supplies. They will also be responsible for their distribution by sea (assisted in some respects by the Admiralty). The Ministry of Transport should in future be responsible for the arrangements for the distribution of supplies by road or railway or canal and for the supply of electricity. The Home Office will be responsible for arrangements concerning the preservation of law and order. The Ministry of Labour should however be responsible for the recruiting and allocation of labour - that Department being concerned with conciliation and negotiations with the strikers it seems better that it should, as previously, be as far as possible dissociated from activities which might be regarded as strike breaking. As regards Scotland there would be a unified organisation based upon the principle of bringing the emergency arrangements in Scotland (except general government services such as the Fighting Services and the Post Office and to some extent coal and shipping services) under the control of one Minister or other representative of the Government during an emergency. The details of this organisation will be worked out by the Scottish Office and the Board of Trade in consultation with any other Departments concerned. Coordination with coal and shipping services will require special consideration in detail.

It should be for the responsible Minister to say what is the best and cheapest organization which will enable him to discharge his responsibilities; it being realised that in many respects it will be impossible to guarantee effective arrangements in view of the disappearance of much wartime material and personnel.

A few ad hoc executive bodies may however be necessary, at any rate in times of emergency, where more than one Department or no special Department is concerned, e.g. for Communications, "Protection" or Publicity.
4. The executive machine should be decentralized as much as possible and there should therefore be local organizations capable of being brought into existence at short notice with persons on the spot who can take decisions and who are in touch with the Central Government and with the Local Authorities. We think that for this purpose the previous scheme of having a number (say 11) of "Civil Commissioners", who would probably be junior members of the Government, and to each of whom would be allocated a Division of England and Wales, should be continued. We suggest that the Commissioners should be nominated forthwith and be invited to acquaint themselves with their duties. Much preliminary local work can be done by their Staff Officers under cover of their work as Inspectors under the Ministry of Health. Scotland has a separate local organization already in course of preparation, and this also should be continued.

5. The function of the Civil Commissioner should be to coordinate the local services and the local operation of the national services and to stimulate necessary local activity, particularly recruiting.

6. For this last purpose the Volunteer Service Committees (now about 88) set up by the existing Civil Commissioners' Department should be continued. The Chairman of these Committees are specially selected gentlemen of local standing and influence. All except two are now in office, and have received instructions as precise as the present state of the other Government schemes admits, and in many cases they have been in touch with their local authorities' clerks. In times of emergency each has attached to him local representatives of the national services mainly concerned (railway, road transport, food, postal) and a Finance Officer (usually a National Insurance Act Inspector).

7. The Civil Commissioner should have associated with him, besides his Staff Officer (a General Inspector of the Ministry of Health) and, in times of emergency, a Finance Officer, local representatives of such Government Departments (e.g. Food, Coal, Transport, Post Office, Shipping) as may be necessary having regard to the nature of the emergency and local conditions, and a military liaison officer. He will also be in close touch with the Police.

8. These local representatives will have executive functions under the schemes prepared by their Departments, and they should receive in advance from their Departments as precise general instructions as possible, (these being communicated also to the Civil Commissioners through the Civil Commissioners' Department), but we think the normal rule should be that once the emergency has begun they should, as regards any particular problem arising, be regarded as acting under the directions of the Civil Commissioner. This rule must however be subject to exceptions as regards some services (e.g. Postal and coal and shipping arrangements) which require to be centrally controlled; now will the Civil Commissioner normally be responsible for "protection". As regards these, he should be kept fully informed, but should assume control only in the event of the area becoming isolated owing to a
breakdown of communications between London and the locality concerned, when he would, as long as the isolation persisted, assume the role of the Central Government.

9. The question whether these local representatives should be appointed now or only when an emergency is immediately threatened is one for consideration by the Departments concerned when preparing their schemes, having regard inter alia to considerations of economy and secrecy (as to which see below).

10. For coordination of the local organizations it is desirable to appoint a Chief Civil Commissioner in London. We suggest that he should be a Minister preferably of Cabinet rank (not in one of the three Service Departments) whose Departmental duties would be relatively light in times of emergency, and who would also be sufficiently free to take an active interest in the schemes in normal times. He should be a member of the Cabinet Committee referred to in recommendation 2. His Chief Staff Officer would be a General Inspector of the Ministry of Health.

11. The special machinery for coordinating Government activities in London under the main Cabinet Committee should be of the simplest possible character. In normal times it should consist merely of a single standing Sub-Committee meeting periodically in the Home Office to supervise the preparation of the schemes and to coordinate them. The actual working out of the schemes should be done by the Departments responsible. Where a scheme primarily concerns more than one Department (e.g., the Air Mail Scheme, which is primarily one for the Home Office and Air Ministry) these Departments should maintain contact by the ordinary methods of correspondence and inter-departmental conversations, one of them being designated by the Standing Committee as responsible for taking the initiative.

We think it would be advantageous that the Chief Civil Commissioner should be designated Chairman of the Standing Committee, even if not always able to attend; his chief of staff should also be a member. The other members should be representatives of the Home Office, Scottish Office, Admiralty, War Office, Air Ministry, Treasury, Ministry of Health, Office of Works, Ministry of Transport (representatives for roads, railways, and electricity), Board of Trade (representatives for food, mines, shipping, petrol, and statistical information), Post Office, Board of Customs and Excise, Ministry of Agriculture, and Ministry of Labour (for liaison).

12. In times of emergency this coordinating body would be too unwieldy, and should be replaced by machinery better designed to secure rapid and effective executive action. In previous strikes a large number of special Sub-Committees have been set up for this purpose; we think that this should be avoided in future, most of the work being done in the ordinary way by the Departments responsible for the various subjects, and that the special Sub-Committees should be limited to the following:

(a) Food Fuel and Transport Sub-Committee consisting of representatives of the Board of Trade, Ministry of Transport, Board of Customs and Excise and Civil Commissioner's organisation, to supervise and coordinate the execution of the schemes for the supply and transport of food and fuel.
(c) **Protection Sub-Committee**—To supervise and coordinate measures for protecting persons at work, transport, vulnerable points &c., and for checking disorder. It should consist of representatives of the Home Office, Scottish Office, Admiralty, War Office, and Civil Commissioner’s organization; in so far as liaison is required with other Departments or Sub-Committees (e.g., when any of them applies for protection) this can be secured by a representative of the Department or Sub-Committee attending the meeting.

(d) **Communications Sub-Committee**—To deal with communications by post, telegraph, telephone, wireless, air mail, and despatch riders, and consisting of representatives of the Home Office, Air Ministry, War Office, Admiralty, Post Office, Scottish Office, Ministry of Transport, and Civil Commissioner’s organization.

(e) **Finance Sub-Committee**—To deal on behalf of the Treasury with applications for approval of emergency expenditure and consisting of representatives of the Treasury, of the principal spending Departments (Board of Trade, Ministry of Transport and Office of Works), and of the Ministry of Labour (to advise on rates of pay &c.).

(f) **Publicity Sub-Committee** (probably). This matter is highly specialized and not obviously one for any Department in particular. But in view of the disbandment of most of the publicity officers in Government Departments, on whom the Government publicity organization has mainly depended in recent strikes, the question what arrangements are needed to enable an effective publicity organization to be set up at short notice in an emergency requires to be reviewed ab initio, and appears to be one for early consideration by the Standing Sub-Committee mentioned in recommendation 11.

Some machinery will be required for maintaining liaison between these sub-committees and for the settlement or submission to the main Cabinet Committee of questions affecting more than one of them and important questions of policy. We think that this purpose will be served by constituting their Chairmen and the Chief Civil Commissioner a standing coordinating Committee.

13. Having regard to the foregoing we recommend that the main Cabinet Committee should consist of the Home Secretary, Secretary for Scotland, First Lord of the Admiralty, Secretary of State for War, Secretary of State for Air, President of the Board of Trade, Minister of Health, Minister of Transport, Minister of Labour (to deal with the strike situation generally) Chief Civil Commissioner, and a Treasury Minister when necessary. There should be two Secretaries, one being also a Secretary of the Standing Sub-Committee (in normal times) or of the Coordinating Committee referred to at the end of recommendation 12 (in times of emergency) and the other a member of the Cabinet Secretariat.

14. On the subject of finance, while it may prove necessary for Parliamentary reasons to deal with exceptional expenditure incurred by the various Departments during an actual emergency in a single Emergency Services Vote, we think that the principle should be affirmed even more strongly than
herefore that each of the Departments must be responsible for defending its own expenditure in Parliament. As regards expenditure in normal times, we concur in the recommendation made early last year (when the nucleus organization needed in normal times was reviewed), and approved by the Government, that each Department should bear on its own votes any expenditure incurred on its nucleus organization.

The total expenses of all Departments on nucleus schemes in normal times were estimated early last year as £1,750 per annum. We believe they have been considerably less; but we have not explored this question as the subject would not appear to be within the scope of this report, which deals with the outlines of the organization required. The actual schemes and their cost will be a matter for the Departments concerned when considering what those schemes should be (see recommendations 3 and 9).

15. We have devoted some consideration to the question of keeping secret the establishment of the organization proposed above. Prior to the strikes of 1919 and 1920 not only the detail of Government plans but even the existence of the special Government organization was kept largely secret. For example the appointment of the Civil Commissioners was not announced, and the instructions to local authorities were not issued, until the last moment. But the problem is now more complex. There are no longer large numbers of local officials of the Central Government, through whom the schemes can be worked, and although some Local Road and Food Officers, Chairman of Committees, &c., would be appointed who could safely be taken into confidence, the schemes would in future depend for successful working largely on Committees of business men (e.g., in the haulage, food, shipping, and coal trades), preliminary meetings of which would probably involve risk of leakage of the Government plans. It will be for the Departments concerned, when submitting their schemes for approval, to deal also with the question how far the appointment of any particular bodies (or the issue of instructions to particular classes of persons) in advance should be carried in the interests of efficiency despite risk of leakage. Our view on the question generally is that while there is something to be said for allowing the existence of a Government plan to become known, disclosure of details should be avoided so far as possible and that in so far as people have to be taken into confidence they should be told only what is essential to enable them to perform their functions. As regards the appointment of the Civil Commissioners, persons interested in Government plans for dealing with emergencies would probably assume that they will have been appointed as on previous occasions and we see no harm in the fact becoming known gradually; any public announcement, or their sudden and simultaneous appearance in their divisions in normal times, might of course create a scare and should be avoided.

If the foregoing proposals are approved the immediate action to be taken by Ministers will be-

(a) to set up the ad hoc Cabinet Committee (recommendations 2 and 13) and the Standing Sub-Committee (recommendation 11).

(b) to select and appoint the Civil Commissioners and Chief Civil Commissioner (recommendations 4 and 10).

John Anderson,
(Chairman).

5th July, 1923.