CABINET.

SITUATION IN CHINA.

CONCLUSIONS of a Conference of Ministers held at 10, Downing Street, S.W., on Tuesday, 14th September, 1926, at 4 p.m.

PRESENT:--


The Right Hon. Sir Laming Worthington-Evans, Bart., G.B.E., M.P., Secretary of State for War.

The Right Hon. Sir Arthur Steel-Maitland, Bart., M.P., Minister of Labour.

THE FOLLOWING WERE ALSO PRESENT:--


Rear-Admiral Frederick C. Dreyer, C.B., C.B.E., Assistant Chief of Naval Staff, Admiralty.

Mr. T. Jones, Deputy Secretary, Cabinet.
The Conference was consulted by the Foreign Office in regard to the situation arising out of the recent incident at Wenshien in the Upper Yangtze. On September 5th, H.M.S. "Widgeon" and a river steamer manned by Naval officers and ratings, carried out an operation (1) to extricate H.M.S. "Cockchafer"; (2) to release six officers of the British Mercantile Marine held prisoner by Chinese soldiers on board captured British river steamers, and (3) to recapture, if possible, these steamers. In spite of fierce opposition, the first two and most important objects were successfully achieved.

Several communications had since passed, and on September 13th Sir R. Macleay had telegraphed from Peking concurring in the view of the Commander-in-Chief that an attempt should be made to secure the release of the merchant vessels by negotiation with Yang Sen in the presence of an armed demonstration at Wansien. Sir R. Macleay deprecated anything in the nature of an ultimatum, as opposed to negotiation backed by a demonstration by force. There was evidence that Yang Sen was disposed to release the ships. (Foreign Office telegrams, Nos. 308, 310, dated 13th September).

The Chancellor of the Exchequer read extracts from a recent Foreign Office Memorandum and the Conference heard the views of the representatives of the Foreign Office and Admiralty.

The Conference agreed:

(a) To sanction the dispatch of instructions to His Majesty's Minister at Peking and to the Commander-in-Chief to the effect that in the event of the negotiations for the release of the two vessels, which are understood to be proceeding, proving unsuccessful, the naval authorities be given discretion in conjunction with and on the advice of His Majesty's Consular Officers, to recover the ships using force only if necessary and for this purpose alone.