CONCLUSIONS of a Meeting of the War Cabinet held at 10 Downing Street, S.W.1, on Saturday, October 28, 1939, at 11.30 A.M.

Present:
The Right Hon. NEVILLE CHAMBERLAIN, M.P., Prime Minister (in the Chair).
The Right Hon. VISCOUNT HALIFAX, M.P., Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.
Admiral of the Fleet the Right Hon. The Right Hon. WINSTON S. LORD CHATFIELD, Minister for Co-ordination of Defence.
The Right Hon. L. HORE-BELISHA, M.P., Secretary of State for War.
The Right Hon. Sir SAMUEL HOARE, Bt., M.P., Lord Privy Seal.
The Right Hon. Sir JOHN ADBERSONS
The Right Hon. ANTHONY EDEN, M.P., Secretary of State for Home Department and Minister of Home Security.
The Right Hon. W. S. MORRISON, K.C., M.P., Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister of Food (Items 10 and 11).
The Right Hon. ERNEST BROWN, M.P., Minister of Labour and National Service (Items 10 and 11).
The Right Hon. Sir SAMUEL HOARE, Bt., M.P., Lord Privy Seal.
Sir HORACE J. WILSON, Permanent Secretary to the Treasury
Rear-Admiral T. S. V. PHILLIPS, Deputy Chief of Naval Staff (Items 1-9).

The following were also present:
The Right Hon. Sir JOHN GILMOUR, Bt., M.P., Minister of Shipping (Items 10 and 11).
The Right Hon. OLIVER STANLEY, M.P., President of the Board of Trade (Items 10 and 11).
The Right Hon. ERNEST BROWN, M.P., Minister of Labour and National Service (Items 10 and 11).

Secretariat:
Sir EDWARD BRIDGES.
Sir ROBERT HOWARD.
Colonel L. C. BORTIN, R.M.
Mr. F. HEALING.
Lieutenant-Colonel V. DURRIS, R.M.
Lieutenant-Colonel H. I. C. MACC, R.E.
Mr. A. DAVIES.
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The Secretary of State for Air said that a raid had been carried out by aircraft from aerodromes in France to drop leaflets over Munich, Stuttgart, and Nuremberg.

An enemy reconnaissance aircraft had appeared off Grimsby the day before. It had been engaged by a fighter, but had made its escape. One of our own reconnaissance aircraft, however, had been shot down at the mouth of the Humber. It was thought that it must have been mistaken for the enemy raider, which was being pursued in the clouds.

A report had just been received that two Heinkel bombers had penetrated over the Clyde during the morning. One, and probably the other, had been shot down, though confirmation had not yet been received.

The War Cabinet took note of the above statement.

The First Lord of the Admiralty said that it had now been confirmed that U-14 and U-16 had both been destroyed in the neighbourhood of the Straits of Dover.

The French had captured a German ship of 4,000 tons off the West coast of Africa, and had brought her into Dakar. On the other hand, a British ship of 5,000 tons had been torpedoed West of Land's End. She had not sunk, and it was hoped to get her in.

The War Cabinet took note of the above statement.

The First Lord of the Admiralty informed the War Cabinet that he had now received the report of Admiral Drax on the circumstances of the sinking of H.M.S. Royal Oak and of the condition of the defences of Scapa Flow. It appeared that certain representations had been made by the local naval authorities in the early part of the year as to the Scapa defences, but it had not been considered necessary to take steps to improve them. Some of the drifters which had been picketing the entrances to the Flow had been withdrawn for use at other anchorages which had been taken into use in view of the threat of air attack. There could be no doubt that the U-boat in question had passed through one of these unguarded entrances. It was obvious that the possibility of submarine attack had never entered into the minds of those on board the Royal Oak. The lesson was clear that we could not take anything for granted, but must be continually on the watch and guarding against every conceivable contingency in our defences.

The wish was expressed that a copy of the report might be made available for perusal by members of the War Cabinet.

Some discussion took place as to the statement which would have to be made by the First Lord of the Admiralty to the House of Commons on the matter in the ensuing week. It would have to be admitted that the anchorage at Scapa had been unsafe against submarine attack, but it should be made clear that the necessary defences were being provided. Such a statement would not be helpful in any way to the enemy. The First Lord's statement might also include a review of gains and losses at sea during the first two months of war. The view was generally expressed that any pressure for a long and detailed enquiry into the apportionment of blame for any deficiencies at Scapa should be resisted, since this would involve a great diversion of effort in the Admiralty from other more important work.

The War Cabinet took note that the First Lord of the Admiralty would make available for the perusal of members of the War Cabinet a copy of the report of Admiral Drax.
The War Cabinet took note of the above statement.

5. The Minister for Co-ordination of Defence informed the War Cabinet that he had convened a meeting the evening before of the Ministerial Committee which had recently considered various strategic matters, in order to form an opinion on telegram No. 305 from Belgrade, and advise as to the measures which should be taken. The War Cabinet were given a full explanation of the view which the Committee had formed, and of the action which they recommended should be taken. A full account of the discussion is recorded in the Secretary's Standard File of War Cabinet Conclusions.

The War Cabinet—

(a) Approved the action which had been, or was about to be, set on foot in accordance with the recommendations made by the Committee.

(b) Took note that the Minister of Home Security would confer with the Commander-in-Chief, Home Forces, with a view to preparing the police to meet certain contingencies.

(c) Invited the Secretary of State for Air to furnish the War Cabinet each morning with the weather forecast for the ensuing 24 hours.

8. The War Cabinet had under consideration a Memorandum by the Secretary of State for War covering a letter from General Gamelin to the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, and a draft reply by the Chief of the Imperial General Staff (Paper W.P. (39) 100).

The Secretary of State for War explained that the draft letter from the Chief of the Imperial General Staff was only an interim reply. He recalled that at the meeting referred to in the margin it had been agreed that we should not discuss the general matters, including intended military contributions of the Western Powers. The treaty, however, would identify how to General Gamelin what we did, in fact, intend to raise more than the 920,000 to which he had referred in his letter.

In discussion, various amendments were agreed upon, having for their object to make it clear
Italy. and the plan for the formation of a neutral Balkan bloc.

(Previous Reference: W.M. (39) 62nd Conclusions, Minute 11.)

The War Cabinet took note of the above statement.

7. The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs drew attention to telegram No. 1079, dated the 20th October, 1939, from His Majesty's Ambassador, Rome, setting out in detail the reasons why he would prefer postponing an approach to Count Ciano on the question of the formation of a neutral Balkan bloc until after he had had an opportunity of discussing the issues with him (the Secretary of State) in London. There was great force in the arguments brought forward by Sir Percy Loraine, and he (the Secretary of State) proposed accordingly to defer consideration of this question.

The War Cabinet took note of the above statement.

Turkey.

Russia and the Anglo-Turkish Treaty.

(Previous Reference: W.M. (39) 52nd Conclusions, Minute 8.)

The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs drew attention to telegram No. 571, dated the 26th October, 1939, from His Majesty's Ambassador, Ankara, reporting having been informed that morning by M. Sarajoglu, the Turkish Minister for Foreign Affairs, that the Soviet Ambassador had called the previous day and asked a number of questions regarding the Anglo-Turkish Treaty. The replies given by M. Sarajoglu were, from our point of view, very satisfactory.

The War Cabinet took note of the above statement.

The Far Eastern Situation.

The Tientsin question.

(Previous Reference: W.M. (39) 52nd Conclusions, Minute 9.)

The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs drew attention to telegram No. 1421, dated the 25th October, 1939, from His Majesty's Ambassador, Tokyo, reporting a conversation which he had had with Mr. Kato that day with regard to the Tientsin situation. In this conversation Mr. Kato had put forward suggestions for the settlement of the Tientsin question which consisted of a compromise of the kind which we had had in mind. Mr. Kato had agreed to discuss the matter as soon as possible with the Japanese Minister for Foreign Affairs with a view to arranging, if possible, for a proposal on the lines he had suggested being made by the Japanese Government. The prospects of reaching a settlement in regard to this matter with the Japanese Government appeared, therefore, more hopeful.

The War Cabinet took note of the above statement.

[Further text not visible]
The Minister of Food said that the information contained in Paper W.P. (G) (39) 58 confirmed his impression—

(i) that the public were prepared to accept rationing if it could be shown that it was necessary, and
(ii) that the public preferred some inconvenience (provided it was satisfied that there would be an equitable distribution of available supplies) to the risk of food shortage, queues, etc.

In his opinion the home front would be strengthened by the institution of rationing forthwith.

The Minister of Labour thought that the views contained in his Memorandum could be expressed in a sentence, namely, that if there was any risk of a shortage in any of the named commodities, that commodity should be rationed forthwith.

The Prime Minister thought that the position was clearly expressed in the remarks attributed to Mr. Mallon on page 5 of the Memorandum:

"Mr. Mallon (Toynbee Hall) said that (a) imposition of rationing was generally expected, and (b) that it would be accepted with no demur if it were made clear that it was necessary.

Speaking particularly of the East End, he said that in the last war there were two main causes of grievance before the introduction of rationing. The first was the hardship imposed by waiting in queues, and the second, which was even greater, was the knowledge or the belief in the working classes that people who had sufficient money could obtain adequate supplies without having to wait in queues. In his opinion this state of affairs was, from the point of view of the Home Front, the danger point of the last war. In his view, if the working classes were persuaded that everybody was equally restricted and that wealth could not obtain concessions, and that supplies could be obtained in an orderly manner without inconvenience, rationing would be easily accepted."

His provisional conclusion was that the Ration Books should be issued forthwith, that we should ration at once those commodities (bacon and butter) in regard to which there was a shortage at the present time, but that it would be questionable to ration meat and sugar at present.

The First Lord of the Admiralty was not satisfied that it was necessary to ration the four commodities in question. There were signs in the Press of all political shades that public opinion was becoming increasingly critical of governmental control and interference with the liberty of the individual. It was open to doubt whether the governmental machine could operate the rationing arrangements without creating resentment and unrest more serious even than if there were no rationing and shortages had to be faced. In any event, there was no necessity at present to ration meat and sugar. If, in the case of meat, the necessity arose, it should be possible to institute a "meatless day," and in that event, the only machinery required would be the prohibition of sales of meat for consumption on that day. He hoped that the Prime Minister of the Cabinet would decide to take no action at present, in regard to rationing, would announce that no action was possible at present, and wouldJEJn the sugar question to stop buying and to import the necessary quantities of the commodity, aware that the market would have to be supplied from the ordinary channels of trade.
The Prime Minister thought that much would depend on how the matter was presented to the public. At the moment, the press was favourable to the idea of rationing, which public opinion was undoubtedly expecting. Some time was bound to elapse between the date when the Ration Books were issued and the date on which the rationing of particular commodities began. It could be explained that the Government did not propose to ration except in cases where there was a real scarcity and where rationing was, therefore, necessary in order to secure fair and equitable distribution among the public.

The Minister of Food urged reconsideration of the position in regard to sugar. It was clear that hoarding was taking place. There was also the price factor. If we had to buy foreign sugar, we should have to pay 7s. 6d. a cwt. more than the price we had paid for Empire sugar. This would mean an increase of 1d. a pound in the retail price. Would the Chancellor of the Exchequer then be able to maintain his increased sugar tax? There would also be exchange difficulties, and perhaps, most serious of all, an increase in the cost of living figure.

The Prime Minister read to the War Cabinet a letter from the Secretary of State for the Colonies urging that sugar should be rationed as soon as possible. The Prime Minister said that the recent increased consumption of sugar was probably mainly due to hoarding. Hoarding arose from fear of rationing, and if it was announced that sugar would not be rationed, the hoarding (which was not long-term hoarding) might be expected to cease, and the hoarders might use up their stocks. We had some 9 or 10 months' supply of sugar in our ownership at home and abroad, and, in all the circumstances, it seemed justifiable to take the risk of not rationing it.

The Minister of Food felt bound to warn the War Cabinet of other important considerations at stake; if regard was had to these considerations, to the generous ration proposed and to matters such as freedom of rationing in restaurants, &c., he could not avoid the conclusion that, weighty as no doubt the arguments were against rationing, it would be prudent and wise to ration sugar forthwith.

In further discussion it became clear that the War Cabinet generally did not favour the rationing of sugar forthwith. The Prime Minister said that it would, of course, be open to the Minister of Food to invite the Cabinet to reconsider the matter later, if he felt it necessary to do so.

After discussion the War Cabinet agreed:

(1) that the rationing of bacon and butter should be put into operation as an early date;

(2) that the rationing of meat and sugar should not be put

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11. In connection with the discussion recorded in the preceding Minute (Minute 10) the Minister of Shipping said that he was circulating to the War Cabinet a Memorandum on the progress of the Shipping negotiations (Paper W.P. (G.) (39) 60).

Some progress had been made in the discussions with the Swedes, who had now returned to Sweden, and would not be back again for about a week. The Norwegian Delegation had arrived in England and discussions with them had taken place, but the Delegation had no power to make a settlement, even if their demands were met in full. The Delegation was returning to Norway and it might be another week before the discussions could be resumed. The Norwegian demands were fairly high. Some comparatively unimportant bargains had been made with individual Greek shipowners, but, in general, Greek shipping was tending to go to the East on trade of its own. On the whole, the Shipping negotiations with neutral countries had not made the rapid progress that he had hoped, and while a settlement would no doubt ultimately be reached, some time would elapse. His principal anxieties related to the position at the moment and in the immediate future.

The War Cabinet took note of this statement.

Football Pools.

12. The War Cabinet had before them a Report by the Home Policy Committee (Paper W.P. (G.) (39) 60) on the present position in regard to the resumption of Football Pools as set out in a Memorandum by the Postmaster-General (Paper H.P.C. (39) 61).

The recommendations of the Home Policy Committee were as follows:

(i) that, in the circumstances explained in Paper H.P.C. (39) 61, the only way in which Football Pools could be legally forbidden would be by the enactment of ad hoc legislation, and that in the view of the Committee it would be unwise to attempt to pass any such legislation.

(ii) that the question whether coupons should be accepted by the Football Pool Promoters' Association under their new scheme from Naval, Military or Air Force addresses was a matter to be determined by the Association and was not one calling in any way for Government intervention.

The War Cabinet approved these recommendations.
The Home Secretary explained that provision for the application of the Curfew was included in the Defence Regulations just before the beginning of the War. It was therefore a temporary provision, and he had no immediate intention of applying the Regulation. The curfew might be required in the event of serious disturbances.

The War Cabinet agreed—

(i) That the Home Secretary should consider making a statement in Parliament to explain the origin and purpose of the Defence Regulation giving power to impose the Curfew.

(ii) that the Home Secretary should further consider whether it was desirable that the Regulation should be annulled.

Richmond Terrace, S.W. 1,
October 26, 1939.

* Paragraph 9 of Statutory Rule and Order 978.*