CONCLUSIONS of a Meeting of the War Cabinet held in the Cabinet War Room, S.W. 1, on Monday, January 20, 1941, at 5 P.M.

Present:

The Right Hon. Winston S. Churchill, M.P., Prime Minister (in the Chair).
The Right Hon. Anthony Eden, M.P., Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.

The following were also present:
The Right Hon. Sir Archibald Sinclair, Bt., M.P., Secretary of State for Air.
The Right Hon. Oliver Lyttelton, M.P., President of the Board of Trade (Items 5 and 6).
The Hon. Sir Alexander Cadogan, Permanent Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.
General Sir John Dill, Chief of the Imperial General Staff.

Secretariat:

Sir Edward Bridges,
Major-General Sir Hastings Ismay,
Mr. W. D. Wilkinson,
Mr. L. F. Burgis.

Admiral of the Fleet Sir Dudley Pound, First Sea Lord and Chief of Naval Staff.
Air Chief Marshal Sir Charles F. A. Portal, Chief of the Air Staff.
## WAR CABINET 8 (41).

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1. The Chiefs of Staff gave the following reports in amplification of the information contained in Cabinet War Room Records 502-505.

A cheerful telegram had been received from the A.O.C., Malta. In the recent heavy air attacks our fighters had brought down about 25 enemy aircraft and anti-aircraft guns about 12.

The Prime Minister emphasised the importance of maintaining a strong air defence at Malta. Adequate fighter reinforcements must be sent. He asked the Chief of the Imperial General Staff to ascertain the state of the A.A. ammunition reserve.

The Chief of the Air Staff undertook to make enquiries as to the damage suffered by the Hipper class cruiser at Brest. Particulars were given of the damage sustained by Illustrious from the dive-bombing attacks on the 10th, 17th and 19th January. During the previous four days we had lost ten ships, three by U-boat action, one by mine, two by enemy aircraft and three by raider action.

In discussion as to measures to reduce losses the First Lord of the Admiralty undertook that statistics should be worked out showing the losses of stragglers from convoys—

(a) as included among ships sailing in convoys;
(b) as included among ships sailing independently.

Preparations for the attack on Tobruk had been delayed owing to sand storms.

The Italians were falling back on the Kassala front.

The War Cabinet took note of these statements.

2. The Lord Privy Seal reported the decisions taken by the Defence Committee (Operations) on the 16th January.

A record of the discussion is contained in the Secretary's Standard File of War Cabinet Conclusions.

3. The War Cabinet were given the latest information as to the attitude of the Vichy Government.

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4. Discussion took place on the state of readiness of our anti-gas preparations. The following points were made:

(i) The Minister of Home Security said that civilian gas-masks had been examined in the previous summer and found in good condition. The whole question of our anti-gas preparations was being discussed by the Civil Defence Executive Sub-Committee on the following day. He would report later to the War Cabinet.

(ii) There had been reports that the Germans were putting new ingredients into the filters of their gas-masks. We had...
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(ii) There had been reports that the Germans were putting new ingredients into the filters of their gas-masks. We had
taken similar steps, but it would be as well that the Civil Defence Research Committee should look into the matter again.

(iii) If we were to give special publicity to anti-gas precautions in this country, the enemy might treat this as a pretext for starting gas warfare, on the ground that our precautions showed that we meant to use gas ourselves.

The suggestion was made that the accounts of German gas preparations might be allowed to become public in the United States of America.

The War Cabinet—

(1) Took note of the above discussion.

(2) Invited the Chiefs of Staff to consider the suggestion in (iii) above.

Man-Power.
Measures to meet Production Requirements.

The War Cabinet had before them a Note by the Minister of Labour and National Service (W.P. (G) (41) 3), covering a Memorandum on Labour Policy submitted by him to the Production Executive.

The main features of the scheme were that the Minister of Labour, after consultation with the Supply Department concerned, might declare the work of any undertaking to be national work; that restrictions were placed on the termination of employment in such undertakings, subject to appeal to an Industrial Tribunal; that the Minister would use his powers of direction and of registration to the extent that might be necessary to ensure an adequate supply of labour on national work; and that the scheme of reservation from military service should be recast with a view to basing reservation increasingly upon the actual work done by each man, as well as on his age and occupation.

The Minister of Labour said that the scheme had been approved that day by the Production Executive, subject to amendments to paragraphs 3, 6 (ii) and 10.

In discussion, the Minister of Labour said that the proposals in the Paper would be referred to the Advisory Council of Employers and Trade Unions. If the scheme was accepted by the War Cabinet, he proposed to include the main features of it, but not the details, in the speech he was to make in the House of Commons on the following day in the Debate on Production.

The Minister added that he would not use his powers under paragraph 6 to assume responsibility for the payment of full wages to persons compulsorily transferred if found to be incompetent.

The Prime Minister said that he favoured the adoption of this bold and comprehensive scheme. It was clear that in the ensuing months we were bound to feel an increasing stringency of labour for munitions production.

The War Cabinet—

Approved the scheme set out in the Minister of Labour’s Memorandum, subject to the following amendments:—

(1) The substitution for paragraph 3 of the following:—

The Minister will use his powers of registration and of direction through National Service Officers to whatever extent may be necessary to ensure an adequate supply of labour on national work. In the exercise of these powers the Minister is authorised to satisfy himself that the wages and conditions of work are suitable and that adequate provision exists for the housing, feeding and transport of the workpeople concerned.
6. In connection with a Question by Mr. Mander, for answer by the Prime Minister on the following day, the War Cabinet had a short discussion on War Aims.

One view put forward was that any statement which confined itself to generalities would not strike home. (In this connection it was suggested that the draft statement circulated as W.P. (G) 41, while admirable in many respects, would not, in its present form, impress public opinion.) On the other hand any statement which put forward specific proposals would be bound to give rise to difficulties.

Another point of view was that there was a considerable demand in many sections of opinion for a statement, expressed in general principles, of what we were fighting for. No such statement had been issued by the present Government.

It was also pointed out that, on the last occasion when this matter had been discussed, it had been urged that a statement should be made on behalf of this country before President Roosevelt’s Inaugural Speech. The inaugural speech had now been made, and there was a good deal to be said for waiting to see how the position developed in the United States. Would the “Lend-Lease Bill” pass into law in the United States within, say, the next month, and without substantial modification?

The Foreign Secretary informed the War Cabinet that Mr. Maynard Keynes was at work on material to rebut the economic and financial aspect of Germany’s propaganda for a new World Order under German domination.

The War Cabinet—

Invited the Prime Minister to reply to Mr. Mander’s Question in such a manner as to leave the way open for a statement of our War Aims to be made in general terms on behalf of the Government, but without implying that such a statement was likely to be made in the immediate future.