CONCLUSIONS of a Meeting of the War Cabinet held at 10 Downing Street, S.W. 1, on Monday, February 22, 1943, at 6 P.M.

Present:
The Right Hon. C. R. Attlee, M.P., Deputy Prime Minister (in the Chair).
The Right Hon. Anthony Eden, M.P., Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.
The Right Hon. Ernest Bevin, M.P., Minister of Labour and National Service.

The following were also present:
The Right Hon. S. M. Bruce, Representative of the Government of the Commonwealth of Australia.
The Right Hon. L. S. Amery, M.P., Secretary of State for India and Secretary of State for Burma.
The Right Hon. Sir Archibald Sinclair, Bt., M.P., Secretary of State for Air.
The Right Hon. R. S. Hudson, M.P., Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries (Item 3).
Sir Orme Sargent, Deputy Under-Secretary of State, Foreign Office.
Air Chief Marshal Sir Charles F. A. Portal, Chief of the Air Staff.

Sir Ramaswami Mudaliar, Representative of India.

The Right Hon. Viscount Simon, Lord Chancellor.
Colonel the Right Hon. Oliver Stanley, M.P., Secretary of State for the Colonies (Item 4).
The Right Hon. Sir James Grigg, M.P., Secretary of State for War.
The Right Hon. Sir Stafford Cripps, K.C., M.P., Minister of Aircraft Production.
The Right Hon. Brendan Bracken, M.P., Minister of Information.
Admiral of the Fleet Sir Dudley Pound, First Sea Lord and Chief of Naval Staff.
General Sir Alan Brooke, Chief of the Imperial General Staff.

Secretariat:
Sir Edward Bridges.
Lieutenant-General Sir Hastings Ismay.
Mr. Norman Brook.
Mr. I. F. Burgis.
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1. The Chiefs of Staff reported the principal events of the past week.

Bomber Command had attacked Wilhelmshaven (twice), Lorient and Bremen. Enemy losses had been 24 destroyed, 5 probably destroyed and 15 damaged. Our losses had been 11 fighters, 23 bombers, 3 Coastal Command aircraft and 4 Army Co-operation Command aircraft.

In the Mediterranean our aircraft had attacked 5 U-boats and hit 5 merchant ships.

Shipping losses for the previous week amounted to 18,000 tons. This figure did not include losses in the two outgoing Atlantic convoys, which were now being attacked.

A Spanish ship of some 6,000 tons, having on board a cargo of platinum and 2 stowaways from the Graf Spee, had been intercepted and a prize crew put on board.

The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs undertook to make enquiries regarding difficulties raised by the Russians to the installation by us at Murmansk of certain wireless apparatus which we regarded as of vital importance to our convoys to Russia.

The Germans had delivered a successful attack against American forces the previous week in Central Tunisia.

The 8th Army had advanced some 70 miles since the previous week and was now in touch with the Mareth Line. Tripoli Harbour was now capable of handling some 4,000 tons a day.

Fighting had taken place south of Leningrad and in the Lake Ilmen district. The Russians were pushing strongly in the Orel sector. Further south they were making a thrust towards Dnepropetrovsk. East of this there had been heavy fighting at Krasnoarmeisk. The Germans were now evacuating troops from the Taman peninsula by air, by sea and across the Kerch Straits. The recent thaw had hampered Russian activities, but, according to the latest reports, the weather was hardening again.

The War Cabinet—

Took note of these statements.

2. The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs said that a report had been received from Geneva that a member of the International Red Cross Organisation had been informed that in some of the German camps shackling was becoming merely symbolical. He was endeavouring to obtain confirmation of this report. Meanwhile, it was still not possible to make any announcement as to the position in Parliament.

The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs also undertook to enquire into the question whether His Majesty's Government's communication to the German Government, as finally delivered by the Protecting Power, had differed in any point of substance from the text approved by the War Cabinet on the 8th February.

3. The War Cabinet had before them a Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs (W.P. (43) 73) regarding a scheme for segregating Italian prisoners of war opposed to the Fascist regime and forming them into special Labour Battalions under their own leaders. This scheme had already been introduced in India. Should it be extended to Italian prisoners in Great Britain and British East Africa?

It was explained that, if Labour Battalions were formed, the prisoners would first be liberated and enlisted as volunteers under military law. This would avoid contravention of the Geneva Convention. Moreover, such Labour Battalions could be quickly
Reception and Accommodation of Refugees from Enemy-Occupied Territory.

The Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries said that in this country Italian prisoners were already being used for work of national importance, mainly in agriculture, and from that point of view there was no further advantage to be gained by segregating anti-Fascist elements into special battalions. Indeed, such a course might actually reduce the value of the Italian prisoners in this country, taken as a whole, by introducing a cause of controversy into the camps.

The War Cabinet—

(1) Confirmed the approval already given by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs for the introduction of this scheme in India.

(2) Agreed that, subject to consultation with General Sir William Platt, the scheme might be extended, on an experimental basis to Italian prisoners in British East Africa, but not to Italian prisoners in other territories.

Regard was had to the difficulties involved in the reception of Italian prisoners in this country, and the Home Secretary and Minister of Home Security said that, while it would be possible to admit between 1,000 and 2,000 additional refugees into this country, he would not favour this being done except as part of a United Nations scheme. Those who were pressing for further concessions did not, in his view, sufficiently realise the extent of the contribution already made by the British Commonwealth of Nations and the practical difficulties of transferring and maintaining any considerable proportion of those who might wish to escape from enemy-occupied territories.

The War Cabinet—

(1) Agreed that for the present we should maintain our attitude that this problem was one which should be dealt with on a United Nations basis, and that we should not hold out any hope of receiving additional refugees in this country except as part of a United Nations agreement.

(2) Invited the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs to continue to press for a reply to the enquiries already addressed to the United States Government in this matter.

(3) Decided that a statement should be made, in answer to a Parliamentary Question, showing the extent to which refugees had already been admitted to British territory over a convenient period (possibly since the beginning of the war); and invited the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs to submit for consideration by the War Cabinet the draft of a Question and Answer on this point.
5. The Secretary of State for War said that he had to answer a question in Parliament on the following day as to whether the pamphlet dealing with the Beveridge Report, prepared by the Army Bureau of Current Affairs, would now be circulated.

In discussion, it was pointed out that one reason which had been given for the previous withdrawal of the pamphlet had been that it was inappropriate that the Beveridge Report should be discussed at debates held under the aegis of A.B.C.A. before it had been debated in Parliament, and the impression had been given that the issue of the pamphlet had been postponed rather than cancelled.

In the circumstances, the War Cabinet took the view that the Secretary of State for War should reply on the following lines: that he was considering the possibility of producing a more comprehensive brief than the earlier version, in a form suitable as a basis for A.B.C.A. discussions.

The Secretary of State for War would, no doubt, also consult the Ministers concerned before authorising the issue of the revised brief, which would be limited to a summary of Sir William Beveridge’s proposals, and the Government’s decisions.

Offices of the War Cabinet, S.W. 1,
February 22, 1943.