WAR CABINET 147 (43).

CONCLUSIONS of a Meeting of the War Cabinet held at 10 Downing Street, S.W. 1, on Wednesday, 27th October, 1943, at 6 P.M.

Present:

The Right Hon. WINSTON S. CHURCHILL, M.P., Prime Minister (in the Chair).
The Right Hon. OLIVER LYTTELTON, M.P., Minister of Production.

Field Marshal the Right Hon. J. C. SMUTS, Prime Minister of the Union of South Africa.

The following were also present:

The Right Hon. VISCOUNT CRANBORNE, Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs.
The Right Hon. L. S. AMERY, M.P., Secretary of State for India and Secretary of State for Burma (Items 3-5).
The Right Hon. Sir ARCHIBALD SINCLAIR, Bt., M.P., Secretary of State for Air.
The Right Hon. LORD LEATHERS, Minister of War Transport (Items 1-2).
The Hon. Sir ALEXANDER CADOGAN, Permanent Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.
General Sir ALAN BROOKE, Chief of the Imperial General Staff.

The Right Hon. Sir JOHN ANDERSON, M.P., Chancellor of the Exchequer.
The Right Hon. HERBERT MORRISON, M.P., Secretary of State for the Home Department and Minister of Home Security (Items 3-5).
The Right Hon. VISCOUNT CRANBORNE, Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs.
The Right Hon. OLIVER STANLEY, M.P., Secretary of State for the Colonies (Items 3-5).
The Right Hon. 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. RICHARD LAW, M.P., Minister of State.
Air Chief Marshal Sir CHARLES F. A. PORTAL, Chief of the Air Staff.
Vice-Admiral Sir NEVILLE SYFRET, Vice-Chief of Naval Staff.

Secretariat:

Sir EDWARD BRIDGES.
Mr. NORMAN BROOK.
Brigadier L. C. HOLLIS.
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1. The War Cabinet had a general discussion on Future Operations. The discussion and conclusions reached are recorded in the Secretary's Standard File of War Cabinet Conclusions.

2. The War Cabinet had a discussion as to the future of the Italian Fleet. The discussion and conclusions reached are recorded in the Secretary's Standard File of War Cabinet Conclusions.

3. The War Cabinet had before them a Memorandum by the Secretary of State for War (W.P. (43) 471) regarding the treatment of British prisoners of war in Siam; and a Memorandum by the Minister of State (W.P. (43) 484) on the question whether some improvement might be achieved by a systematic campaign of publicity disclosing Japanese treatment of prisoners of war and civilian internees in their hands.

The Minister of State said that, on a balance of all the considerations outlined in his Memorandum, he recommended that a campaign of publicity should be used in the hope that it might force the Japanese to remedy these conditions. Negotiations were, however, proceeding for an exchange of civilian internees, and, to avoid prejudicing those negotiations, he recommended that the publicity campaign should not begin until an agreement for this exchange had been concluded or, alternatively, until it was clear that no such agreement would be reached. This should be clear by the middle or end of January next. The interval could be used for the purpose of discussing with the Governments of the United States, the Dominions, India, the Netherlands and other Allies having prisoners in Japanese hands (who would, in any event, have to be consulted) the proposals for a systematic publicity campaign.

Points in discussion were:

(a) The Secretary of State for War feared that few of the prisoners now held by the Japanese in Siam would survive. Reports which the Foreign Office regarded as reliable indicated that 4,000 had already died, whereas the deaths officially notified by the Japanese totalled only about 100.

(b) It was suggested that it might be helpful if the proposed publicity stressed the extent to which the Siamese must be held responsible for the conditions obtaining within their territory. Fears for the future might have a greater influence on them than on the Japanese.

(c) The Commander-in-Chief, India, had been authorised to maintain general anti-Japanese propaganda in India; but had been asked to avoid references to Japanese treatment of prisoners until the arrangements for a systematic campaign of publicity on this point had been concluded.

The Prime Minister said that we should take all steps in our power to ensure the safety of the large number of British prisoners in Japanese hands, and should not be unduly deterred by the possible effect on the exchange of civil internees. It was, however, essential that we should keep in touch on this matter with the United States, since there were a very large number of United States prisoners in Japanese hands. The first step, therefore, should be to consult the United States Government on the position, putting to them the gravity of the issues involved, and representing to them the advantages which might be expected to follow from a publicity campaign.
The War Cabinet—
Invited the Minister of State, in consultation with the other Ministers concerned, to arrange for the necessary consultations to take place with the United States Government, the Dutch Government, the Dominions Governments and the Government of India in regard to the suggestion that a campaign of publicity should be started with a view to forcing the Japanese to remedy the treatment accorded by them to our prisoners of war.
A further report should be made to the War Cabinet when the views of these Governments had been ascertained.

Reconstruction Plans.
(Previous Reference: W.M. (43) 144th Conclusions, Minute 1.)

5. The Prime Minister said that, in accordance with the conclusion reached by the War Cabinet at their Meeting on the 21st October, he had circulated a Directive (W.P. (43) 476) setting out the procedure to be followed for ensuring the completion of plans for the transition period.

The War Cabinet—
Took note that all Departments concerned were required by this Directive to submit to the Secretary of the War Cabinet, not later than the 10th November, a return giving the information set out in Part I of W.P. (43) 470.

Offices of the War Cabinet, S.W. 1,
27th October, 1943.