W M. (44)
14th Conclusions.

WAR CABINET 14 (44).

CONCLUSIONS of a Meeting of the War Cabinet held at 10 Downing Street, S.W.1, on Tuesday, 1st February, 1944, at 5.30 p.m.

Present:

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


The Right Hon. Sir JOHN ANDERSON, M.P., Chancellor of the Exchequer.

The Right Hon. OLIVER LYTTELTON, M.P., Minister of Production.

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 Right Hon. HERBERT MORRISON, M.P., Secretary of State for the Home Department and Minister of Home Security.

The Right Hon. LORD WOOLTON, Minister of Reconstruction.

The following were also present:

The Right Hon. VISCOUNT CRANBORNE, Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs.

The Right Hon. A. V. ALEXANDER, M.P., First Lord of the Admiralty (Items 2-5).

The Right Hon. Sir ARCHIBALD SINCLAIR, Bt., M.P., Secretary of State for Air.

The Right Hon. Sir STAFFORD CRIPPS, K.C., M.P., Minister of Aircraft Production (Items 2-5).


The Right Hon. LORD LEATHERS, Minister of War Transport (Items 2-5).

The Right Hon. LORD PORTAL, Minister of Works (Items 2-5).

The Right Hon. LORD BEAVERBROOK, Lord Privy Seal.

The Right Hon. Sir JAMES GRIGG, M.P., Secretary of State for War (Items 2-5).

The Right Hon. THOMAS JOHNSTON, M.P., Secretary of State for Scotland (Items 2-5).

The Right Hon. HUGH DALTON, M.P., President of the Board of Trade (Items 2-5).

The Right Hon. R. S. HUDSON, M.P., Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries (Items 2-5).

Colonel the Right Hon. J. J. LLEWELLIN, M.P., Minister of Food (Items 2-5).

Major the Right Hon. G. LLOYD GEORGE, M.P., Minister of Fuel and Power (Items 2-5).
The Right Hon. Ernest Brown, M.P.,
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster
(Item 1).

The Right Hon. Lord Cherwell,
Paymaster-General (Items 2–5).

The Right Hon. W. Whitely, M.P., Mr. Duncan Sandys, M.P.,
Joint Parliamentary Secretary,
Treasury (Item 1).

The Right Hon. Richard Law, M.P.,
Minister of State (Items 2–5).

The Right Hon. James Stuart, M.P.,
Joint Parliamentary Secretary,
Treasury (Item 1).

Mr. W. Whitely, M.P., Mr. Duncan Sandys, M.P.,
Joint Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry
of Supply (Items 2–5).

Secretariat:
Sir Edward Bridges.
Mr. W. S. Murrie.

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WAr caBINET 14 (44).

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1. The War Cabinet had a discussion about the Party Truce in relation to Bye-Elections. The discussion is recorded in the Secretary's Standard File of War Cabinet Conclusions.

Man-Power and Related Questions.

2. The War Cabinet had before them a Memorandum by the Chancellor of the Exchequer (W.P. (44) 52) giving the detailed allocations settled, under the supervision of the Ministerial Committee on Man-Power, for the industries and services in Groups II and III, other than those industries for which detailed allocations had already been made.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer explained that the Ministerial Committee had made a full enquiry, and were satisfied that the allocations proposed were the best that could be made within the existing limitations. The Ministers concerned had been consulted and, although it had not been possible to meet all their points, the proposals in the Memorandum had been generally accepted.

The following points were made in discussion:

(a) The Minister of War Transport pointed out that, since the allocations had been made, he had found it necessary to ask for 9,000 additional workers to meet the demands on transport in the next six months.

(b) The Secretary of State for War said that the allocation for War Office industrial staffs fell far short of War Office requirements. He would, of course, do the best he could with the allocations proposed, but it would be necessary to have recourse to the emergency machinery recently approved by the Cabinet to meet urgent "Overlord" requirements for which staff could not be provided within the allocations.

(c) The Minister of Food pointed out that since he had accepted the allocation for food manufacture, there had been a very large increase in the military demands for canned meat.

(d) The Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries emphasised the serious effect which the proposed allocation would have on agricultural production in 1944. He recalled that an additional 700,000 acres had been ploughed up and that he had been asked to increase the acreage of potatoes to over 1 million. If it were not possible to meet a very much higher proportion of his requirements, he would be compelled to reduce the acreage of potatoes and there would also have to be some reduction in the output of milk. The Ministerial Committee had suggested that his difficulties might be met by the employment of additional prisoners of war, but there was no prospect of his getting a sufficient number of prisoners to make up the difference between his requirements and the allocation proposed.

It was pointed out that the shortage of agricultural workers was not large when compared with the total number of workers in the industry, and that to some extent the demand for additional workers was designed to enable the working week to be reduced, a measure which could hardly be justified at the present time.

The Prime Minister said that he accepted the warning given by the Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries, but that he hoped that he would do everything possible to keep production at the highest level with the resources available to him.

(e) Reference was made to the risk that, if, as a result of security measures in connection with "Overlord," the movement of workers to and from Ireland was interrupted, the difficulties of the Agricultural Departments in maintaining production would be increased. The Prime Minister said that this matter clearly required careful examination; and that any difficulties in regard to it should be brought to the Committee, under his chairmanship, on "Overlord" preparations.
The War Cabinet—

(1) Approved the allocation proposed in the Memorandum by the Chancellor of the Exchequer (W.P. (44) 52).

(2) Agreed that any necessary adjustments in the allocations to meet emergency conditions should be dealt with by the Minister of Production and the Minister of Labour and National Service under the scheme approved by the War Cabinet on the 24th January; any points of difficulty which emerged being referred to the Committee on "Overlord" Preparations presided over by the Prime Minister.

3. The War Cabinet then considered the Memoranda by the Lord President of the Council (W.P. (44) 36) and by the Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries (W.P. (44) 44) on the employment of prisoners of war in the United Kingdom.

General Policy.

The Prime Minister said that he agreed generally that nothing would be gained by bringing additional Italian prisoners into this country at this stage of the war if this led to substantial demands on materials and labour for building new camps and hostels to accommodate them. He suggested, however, that it might be possible to do more than the Lord President's Memorandum contemplated in the way of using existing accommodation.

The Secretary of State for War pointed out that under the Geneva Convention we were bound to provide for Italian prisoners of war the same standard of accommodation as for our own troops. The War Cabinet took the view that our general policy should be to bring as many Italian prisoners as possible to this country, and that the Minister of War Transport should not regard himself as restricted to the figure of 32,500 mentioned in the Lord President's paper.

Allocation.

With reference to paragraph 7 of the Memorandum by the Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries (W.P. (44) 44) the Lord President of the Council pointed out that paragraph 7 (a) of his Memorandum (W.P. (44) 36) was not meant to imply that the Departments possessing available accommodation should necessarily have the prisoners.

The Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries referred to what he had said about the effect on agricultural production of the allocation of labour given by the Ministerial Committee on Man-Power. Whereas the Ministerial Committee had suggested that it might be possible to ease the position by the use of Italian prisoners of war, the Agricultural Departments had been allocated only 8,600 out of 32,500 prisoners of war who were likely to be available. He was satisfied that he could find accommodation for additional prisoners, and he emphasised again that unless a considerable part of the deficiency in labour was met by the allocation of additional prisoners, there would be a serious fall in output.

The Minister of Labour and National Service said that the allocation of Italian prisoners of war had been made by a Committee of Officials convened by the Ministry of Labour. He promised to look into the possibility of varying the allocation with a view to increasing the numbers available for the Agricultural Departments.

Conditions of Employment.

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Supply asked whether steps could not be taken to enable more profitable use to be made of Italian prisoners of war already in this country by giving
them incentives to work harder and by relaxing present restrictions on their movements.

The Secretary of State for War said that he thought that there would be considerable difficulty in doing this, but that he would examine the point in consultation with the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.

The War Cabinet's conclusions were as follows:

1. The time being the Minister of War Transport should bring as many Italian prisoners as possible to this country, and should not regard himself as restricted to the figure of 32,500.

2. At this stage of the war we should not use material and labour in building new camps and hostels for Italian prisoners; but Departments should try to make the maximum use of existing accommodation.

3. Note was taken that the Minister of Labour and National Service would examine the possibility of increasing the number of prisoners allocated to the Agricultural Departments.

4. Note was taken that the Secretary of State for War, in consultation with the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, would examine whether means could be found to make more profitable use of the labour of Italian prisoners.

4. The War Cabinet had before them a Memorandum by the Minister of Production (W.P. (44) 42) setting out the proposed labour allocations for the Government Building Programme for the six months January–June 1944. The Minister explained that he proposed to take stock of the situation in three months' time.

The following points were made in discussion:

(a) The Secretary of State for Air said that the Minister of Production had allocated 14,000 men to the Air Ministry for maintenance. This was based on the number of men employed on maintenance by the Air Ministry in the previous summer, at a time when the number of men on maintenance had been reduced to an abnormally low level in order to employ as many men as possible on new construction. Further, 100 new airfields were now in use and this called for a larger maintenance force.

(b) The First Lord of the Admiralty said that the Admiralty's allocation represented a cut of over 11 per cent. Furthermore, since this cut had been proposed, there had been new operational demands calling for 1,500 men. He also thought that when "Overlord" started it would be necessary to have a pool of 300 or 400 men available to make good damage from enemy air attacks at embarkation points.

(c) The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Supply said that "Phoenix" was now occupying not 14,000 but 29,000 men. On the other hand, the number of men employed on "Ministry of Supply (Other Works)" was not 30,000 but 26,000 men. As a result, arrears of urgent work under this head were accumulating. He thought it would be very difficult to reduce the allocation for "Ministry of Supply (Other Works)" from 30,000 to 29,000 in June next, as proposed by the Minister of Production.

The Prime Minister said the points raised in discussion could appropriately be taken into account in the adjustments which inevitably had to be made in a matter of this kind. In his view the Minister of Production's proposed allocations should be approved.
The War Cabinet—

(1) Approved the allocations of building labour set out in the Memorandum by the Minister of Production.

(2) Agreed that any necessary adjustments in the allocations, to meet emergency conditions, should be dealt with by the Minister of Production and the Minister of Labour and National Service under the scheme approved by the War Cabinet on the 24th January, any points of difficulty which emerged being referred to the Committee on “Overlord” Preparations presided over by the Prime Minister.

5. In connection with the preceding item, the War Cabinet had before them a Memorandum by the Minister of Production (W.P. (44) 43) asking whether provision should be made for certain building proposals put forward by the Ministry of Aircraft Production in relation to “Crossbow.”

After a short discussion the War Cabinet reached the following conclusions:

(1) The proposal to erect the six reserve factories, in the form of prefabricated hangars, referred to in Annex I (a) of W.P. (44) 43 should not be proceeded with.

(2) Authority was given for the following:

(a) the proposal to proceed more quickly, on account of “Crossbow,” with the erection of three radio valve factories which formed part of a long-term expansion of the radio valve industry;

(b) certain smaller extensions and modifications of existing buildings, for which labour would be found from the Ministry of Aircraft Production’s bulk allocation.

Offices of the War Cabinet, S.W. 1,
1st February, 1944.