WAR CABINET 10 (44).

CONCLUSIONS of a Meeting of the War Cabinet held at 10 Downing Street, S.W. 1, on Monday, 24th January, 1944, 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.

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. Lord Woolton, Minister of Reconstruction.

The following were also present:

The Right Hon. S. M. Bruce, Representative of the Government of the Commonwealth of Australia.

The Right Hon. Lord Beaverbrook, Lord Privy Seal.


The Right Hon. Sir Archibald Sinclair, Bt., M.P., Secretary of State for Air.

The Right Hon. Hugh Dalton, M.P., President of the Board of Trade (Item 5).

The Right Hon. Lord Leathers, Minister of War Transport (Item 5).

The Right Hon. Lord Portal, Minister of Works (Item 5).

The Right Hon. Lord Cherwell, Paymaster-General.

The Hon. Sir Alexander Cadogan, Permanent Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.

Marshal of the Air Force Sir Charles Portal, Chief of the Air Staff.

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.

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. R. S. Hudson, M.P., Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries (Item 5).

Colonel the Right Hon. J. J. Llewellyn, M.P., Minister of Food (Item 5).

Major the Right Hon. G. Lloyd George, M.P., Minister of Fuel and Power (Item 5).

Mr. C. J. Radcliffe, K.C., Director-General, Ministry of Information (Item 4).

Admiral of the Fleet Sir Andrew Cunningham, First Sea Lord and Chief of Naval Staff.

Field-Marshal Sir Alan Brooke, Chief of the Imperial General Staff.

Secretariat:

Sir Edward Bridges.

Lieutenant-General Sir Hastings L. Ismay.

Sir Gilbert Laithwaite.

Mr. L. F. Burgis.
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1. The Chiefs of Staff reported the principal events of the previous week.

Bomber Command had made heavy attacks on Berlin and Magdeburg.

Coastal Command had attacked two U-boats, possibly damaging one. Off Norway one merchant ship had been torpedoed and others hit.

"Crossbow" targets had also been attacked by our own and United States forces.

Enemy losses for the week, including claims by the United States Air Forces, amounted to 41 destroyed. Allied losses amounted to 106, including 91 R.A.F. bombers.

10,300 sorties had been flown, 97 per cent. on targets affecting the land battle. Enemy sorties amounted to 850. On the previous Saturday, when the landing around Anzio was taking place, 2,000 sorties had been flown.

Enemy losses amounted to 34 compared to 40 Allied aircraft.

Seven large enemy merchant ships and 28 smaller ones had been claimed sunk.

There had been no shipping losses or belated reports during the previous week. The confirmed losses for January therefore remained at 35,617 tons. During the month 3 U-boats had been sunk and 2 probably sunk.

Naval forces had operated in conjunction with the landing near Anzio. The weather had deteriorated somewhat, but it was expected that the facilities of the port of Anzio would prove adequate.

The sinking of a Japanese cruiser by one of our submarines off Penang had been confirmed. This submarine, the Tally-Ho, had also sunk a merchant ship.

The Allied landing on either side of the port of Anzio was described. So far, the operation had proceeded satisfactorily, and there was no doubt that the enemy had been surprised. The exact strength of the enemy forces in this area was not known, but his main reserves had been drawn into the battle further south. Vigorous offensive action had been taken by British, United States and French troops on the Fifth Army front. Some American forces which had crossed the River Garigliano in front of Cassino had become isolated, and the enemy had taken some 500 prisoners. But nearer to the sea the river had been crossed to a considerable depth, and our positions held against heavy counter-attacks.

Mild weather conditions in Russia had interfered with operations except in the North. The Russian offensives around Leningrad had greatly improved the situation in that area. Further South the Russians had made a considerable advance from Mosyr. In the Dnieper Bend German counter-attacks had only resulted in small gains of ground near Vinnitsa and Uman.

The War Cabinet—

Took note of these statements.

2. The Home Secretary and Minister of Home Security said that on the night of the 21st/22nd January 60 bombers and 12 fighter-bombers had been used. This was the largest force to attack land targets in this country in any one night since the 29th/30th July, 1942. About 30 enemy aircraft had penetrated to the London area. The attack had been very widespread, and while there had been a number of incidents, the damage had not been of a serious nature. The casualties for the whole country had been 28 killed and 108 seriously injured.

The War Cabinet—

Took note of this statement.
The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs reported to the War Cabinet the latest development in connection with relations with the Argentine. As a result of the arrest of a German agent, the attitude of the Argentine Government towards the Axis had very greatly stiffened, and the future relations with Germany were likely to be decided in the next two or three days. In these circumstances, Mr. Cordell Hull was suspending all action for the present.

The Prime Minister informed the War Cabinet that he had thought it well to telegraph personally to Premier Stalin on two or three issues that had recently arisen in the field of relations with Russia and to make our point of view in regard to them clear. He had asked him to receive Sir A. Clark Kerr on his return to Moscow and allow the Ambassador to give him the fuller background. The Prime Minister read to the War Cabinet the text of his message.

The War Cabinet—

Took note of the Prime Minister’s statement and endorsed the terms of his message.

The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs referred to recent telegrams showing that the United States Government had decided on immediate publication of a statement on Japanese atrocities. He felt that we must conform, and was circulating a draft paper to his colleagues. He would welcome any comments as soon as possible.

The Prime Minister said that he favoured bringing out facts, and did not feel that the reactions of this publicity on Japanese treatment of our prisoners were likely to be bad.

The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs added that he anticipated that there might be some criticism of failure to publish this matter earlier. The answer was that in a matter of this gravity and seriousness it was clearly impossible to publish until the facts were reasonably well established.

The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs reported that he had been asked to serve as the channel (since there was no other way of despatching the message) for a message of goodwill from some seventy Members of Parliament to the meeting of Italian Liberal politicians which was to take place at Bari on the 28th January.

The Prime Minister urged that every effort should be made to secure, if not the cancellation, at any rate a postponement, of the meeting on the ground that the fresh offensive in Italy was a new factor since the meeting had been arranged and that all energies were now concentrated on the battle of Rome. We could argue that postponement might give the convenors a very much better meeting-place at the cost of a very brief delay. He was averse from using the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs even as a channel in circumstances such as these.

After discussion, the War Cabinet—

Agreed that the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs should telegraph at once to Mr. Macmillan, asking him to do all he could to secure the postponement of this meeting. If it proved impossible to stop the meeting, it was left to the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs to settle what should be done as regards the transmission of the message from British Members of Parliament.

"Overlord."

Security Arrangements.

4. The War Cabinet had before them a Memorandum by the Chiefs of Staff (W.P. (44) 24) drawing attention to the undesirability of public pronouncements about the imminence of Continental operations, and also to the dangers which flowed from speculation in the Press about forthcoming operations.

The Director-General of the Ministry of Information said that, since the Memorandum was circulated, agreement had been reached
with the United States Authorities on this matter. Letters on the same general lines had been sent by the Ministry of Information to newspaper proprietors in this country, and by the appropriate United States authority to newspapers in the United States, drawing their attention to the type of article on forthcoming operations which was attended by risks, and enjoining on them to abstain from speculation.

The Prime Minister said that he had been informed by the Minister of Information (who was unable to attend the meeting) that the Supreme Allied Commander intended to take selected Press correspondents into his confidence to an extent which seemed, in all the circumstances, undesirable. He undertook to send a personal letter to the Supreme Allied Commander on this matter.

The Secretary of State for Air drew attention to an article in a recent issue of the Daily Mail dealing with the use of heavy bombers in connection with "Overlord" which was open to objection. It was understood that the article had not been submitted for censorship. This article had been written before the despatch of the letter referred to by the Director-General of the Ministry of Information.

The War Cabinet's conclusions were as follows:—

1. The views of the Chiefs of Staff as to the undesirability of public pronouncements on the imminence of operations on the Continent and of speculation in the Press about forthcoming operations were endorsed; the action taken by the Ministry of Information to deal with this matter was noted with approval.

2. The Minister of Information was asked to find out why the article in the Daily Mail, referred to by the Secretary of State for Air, had not been submitted for censorship.

Preparations for "Overlord."

(a) A Joint Memorandum by the Minister of Labour and National Service and the Minister of Production (W.P. (44) 2). During the period of this operation additional materials, equipment and labour required for it would have to be diverted from other production or services. The two Ministers sought approval for a procedure whereby their respective Ministries should act together in examining special requirements of this character, making plans to meet them and deciding in detail how any further needs should be met as and when they arose.

(b) A Memorandum by the Minister of War Transport (W.P. (44) 11) specifying the additional labour requirements of his Ministry for railways, road transport, highways and dock labour. This labour would be required at an early date, before the actual operation.

(c) A Joint Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Air and the Minister of Aircraft Production (W.P. (44) 13) setting out certain conditions which they would like to see attached to the proposals in the Memorandum by the Minister of Labour and National Service and the Minister of Production.

The Prime Minister said that he thought that the meetings of the Committee on Anti-U-Boat Warfare, which had at one time been held weekly and were now held at longer intervals, should in future only be held about once every two months. In place of that Committee, he thought it would be desirable that there should be a weekly meeting to review the impact of the "Overlord" preparations on war programmes and on the civil life of the country generally. The meetings would not, of course, deal with tactical or
strategical issues. The Committee, which had been set up by the War Cabinet a week earlier, under the Chairmanship of the Minister of Production, to deal primarily with inland transport and the impact thereon of "Overlord" preparations, would, of course, continue. The results of this and of any other similar enquiries would, however, be reported to the new Committee.

General agreement was expressed with this proposal.

Discussion then turned on the proposals in the Joint Memorandum by the Minister of Labour and National Service and the Minister of Production. Objection was seen by several Ministers to the terms of paragraph 8, which read as follows:

"It would be our joint responsibility to see that other Departments which might be affected by our decisions under this head were advised as soon as the appropriate proposals had been adopted."

Anxiety was felt lest the effect of the procedure recommended might be to interfere with vital arrangements of war production in the event of an emergency, such as was contemplated, arising.

The Prime Minister suggested that the point could be met by rewording the paragraph so as to make it clear that it would be the joint responsibility of the two Ministers to see that other Departments which might be affected by their decisions under this head were consulted in good time; and equally that it must be recognised that it would be incumbent on all Departments concerned to do their utmost to give effect to the proposals put to them.

The War Cabinet—

(1) Took note, with approval, of the Prime Minister's proposal to set up a new Committee under his Chairmanship to deal with the impact of "Overlord" preparations on civilian life and the war programmes.

(2) Approved generally the proposal in the Memorandum by the Minister of Labour and National Service and the Minister of Production subject to the modification proposed by the Prime Minister at "X." Any points of difficulty which emerged from the working out of the scheme would, of course, be reported to the new Committee referred to in (1).

Offices of the War Cabinet, S.W. 1,
24th January, 1944.
Please convey following message from Prime Minister to Marshal Stalin.

1. We are sending Ambassador Clark Kerr back to you at once in order that he may explain a series of difficulties which, although they appear trifling at the outset, may ripen into the greatest embarrassments for us both.

2. I have been much impressed and also surprised by the extraordinary bad effects produced here by the Pravda story to which so much official publicity was given by the Soviet Government. Even the best friends of Soviet Russia in England have been bewildered. What makes it so injurious is that we cannot understand it. I am sure you know that I would never negotiate with the Germans separately and that we tell you every overtune they make as you have told us. We never thought of making a separate peace even in the years when we were all alone and could easily have made one without serious loss to the British Empire and largely at your expense. Why should we think of it now when our triple fortunes are marching forward to victory? If anything has occurred or been printed in the English newspapers annoying to you, why can you not send me a telegram or make your Ambassador come round and see us about it? In this way all the harm that has been done and suspicions that have been aroused could be avoided.

3. I get every day long extracts from "War and the Working Classes" which seem to make continuous Left-Wing attacks on our administration in Italy and politics in Greece. Considering you have a representative on the Commission for Italy, we should hope that these complaints would be ventilated there and we should hear about them and explain our point of view between Governments. As these attacks are made in public in the Soviet newspapers which on foreign affairs are believed rightly or wrongly not to diverge from the policy of the Soviet Union, the divergence between our Governments becomes
a serious Parliamentary issue. I have delayed speaking to the House of Commons till I see the results of the battle in Italy which is not going too badly, but in a week or ten days I shall have to address the House of Commons and deal with the matters to which I have referred in this telegram as I cannot allow charges and criticisms to go unanswered.

4. I have been very much buoyed up with the feeling I brought back from Tehran of our good relations and by the message you sent me through Benes, and I try night and day to make things go the way you wish them and the way our triple interests require. I am sure if we had been together these difficulties would not have occurred. I am working now constantly at making the Second Front a success and on a larger scale, and my work is rendered more difficult by the kind of pin-pricking to which I have referred. Of course a few words spoken by you would blow the whole thing out of the water. We have always agreed to write frankly to each other, so I do so now, but I hope you will see Clark Kerr when he arrives and let him explain more at length the position as between Allies not only fused together in war but linked by our Twenty Years' Treaty.

5. I have not yet been able to telegraph about my talks with the Poles because I must, in matters of such far-reaching importance, know where I am with the United States. I hope however to send you a message in a few days.

6. Brigadier Maclean and my son Randolph have safely parachuted into Tito's headquarters.

(OTP)

Distribution

The King
Foreign Secretary
Sir B. Bridges
General Ismay

War Cabinet
Lord Privy Seal
Secretary of State for the Dominions
Minister of Aircraft Production
Service Ministers

Information