WAR CABINET 29 (44).

CONCLUSIONS of a Meeting of the War Cabinet held at 10 Downing Street S.W. 1, on Monday, 6th March, 1944, at 7 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 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.
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.
Colonel the Right Hon. J. J. LLEWELLYN, M.P., Minister of Food (Items 5-7).
The Right Hon. LORD CHERWELL, Paymaster-General.
The Right Hon. W. WHITELEY, M.P., Joint Parliamentary Secretary, Treasury (Items 5-7).
Admiral of the Fleet Sir ANDREW CUNNINGHAM, First Sea Lord and Chief of Naval Staff (Items 1-4).

Field-Marshal Sir ALAN BROOKE, Chief of the Imperial General Staff (Items 1-4).

Secretariat.

SIR EDWARD BRIDGES.
Lieutenant-General SIR HASTINGS L. ISMAY.
Mr. W. S. MURRIE.
Mr. L. F. BUEGIE.
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1. The Chiefs of Staff reported the principal events of the previous week. Bomber Command had attacked Stuttgart. United States aircraft had attacked Brunswick, French airfields and "Crossbow" targets. In the attack on Berlin the Americans that day had sent 800 aircraft and had lost 45. The escorting fighters were reported to have destroyed 70 enemy aircraft for the loss of 14.

During the month of February 32,600 tons of bombs had been dropped, of which 23,000 had been on Germany. Enemy losses for the week amounted to 88 aircraft destroyed and 14 probably destroyed. Our losses included 5 R.A.F. bombers and 45 United States bombers. The A.E.A.F. had lost 9 bombers and 52 fighters.

In the Mediterranean the enemy had lost 23 aircraft destroyed as against 41 Allied. A number of enemy ships had been sunk or damaged. Rabaul had been attacked without any response from the Japanese.

The confirmed shipping losses by enemy action for the week amounted to 6,202 tons, but it was anticipated that belated reports might add another 14,000. February losses, including belated reports, amounted to 79,766 tons. This was the lowest figure for any month of the war.

Shellfire and bad weather had interfered with unloading operations in the Anzio bridgehead.

In the north the Russians were advancing following the German retirement. Further south in the Shepetovka area the Russians had advanced to a depth of 30 miles on a 112-mile front. The Germans were fighting hard in this area owing to the seriousness of the threat to the Warsaw–Odessa railway. In the Kriovi Rog area the Russians had made some progress.

There had been almost no change in the lines occupied by our forces.

The War Cabinet—
Took note of these statements.

2. The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs said that Mr. Granville, M.P., had put down a Question, for answer on the following day, about the conversations with representatives of the Turkish Government. It was clearly not in the public interest to give any information on this matter. If, therefore, Mr. Granville was unwilling to withdraw the Question, he proposed to confine his reply to saying that he had no statement to make at the present time.

The War Cabinet—
Approved this course.

3. The Prime Minister said that the Archbishop of Canterbury had suggested to His Majesty The King that there should be a National Day of Prayer for the success of our arms in the operations which were to be undertaken this year in Western Europe. His own view was that, in view of the difficulty of selecting a suitable date and the danger of discouraging the troops, the proposal was inexpedient, and he proposed to advise His Majesty in this sense. If necessary, a National Day of Prayer might be held some time after the operations had begun.

The War Cabinet—
Approved the course of action proposed by the Prime Minister.
Negotiations with Japan for the Exchange of Civilians.

4. The War Cabinet had before them a Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs (W.P. (44) 137) regarding negotiations with Japan for an exchange of civilians.

The Memorandum explained that it had been hoped that the negotiations, which had been going on for some time, would result in the release of 1,600 of the 17,000 British and Allied civilians remaining in the Far East, including 600 of the 2,500 in Hong Kong, where food conditions were extremely bad and were rapidly deteriorating. Apart from their primary object, the negotiations were important in that the exchange ships were the only means by which the Americans and we could send much-needed supplies of medicines, food and clothing to British and Allied prisoners of war and civilians.

A deadlock had been reached in the negotiations because the Australian Government were unwilling to release 330 pilots and pearl-divers who had been included among the 1,600 civilian internees selected by the Japanese Government for repatriation. The Australian Government claimed that these seamen, who had been resident in Australia up to the outbreak of war, could not be released on account of the specialised knowledge which they possessed of operational waters and because of their value in salvaging operations. The attitude of the Australian Government was strongly endorsed by General MacArthur.

In these circumstances, the Memorandum proposed that the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs should seek the concurrence of His Majesty's Governments and the Allied Governments concerned in proposing to the Japanese Government an exchange on a head-for-head basis of 1,270 persons in place of 1,600, the Japanese Government relinquishing their claim to the 330 Japanese seamen in return for the right to select 330 British or Allied civilians in Japanese hands to be excluded from the exchange.

The Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs asked whether it might not be possible to get the Australian Government to agree to the release of the 330 Japanese seamen now that operations in the Pacific had moved further from Australia.

Mr. Bruce doubted whether it would be possible to move the Australian Government. The case for releasing the seamen had been put very strongly to the Australian Government and through them to General MacArthur; but both the Government and General MacArthur were very emphatically opposed to the release.

The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs said that he had not much hope that the Japanese Government would accept any arrangement which would not give them the 330 Japanese pilots and pearl-divers for whom they had asked. He felt, however, that it was worth making an attempt on the lines proposed. If the Japanese Government would not accept an arrangement of this kind a further approach might be made to the Australian Government.

The War Cabinet—

Endorsed the proposal made in paragraph 9 of W.P. (44) 137, on the understanding that, if the offer was not accepted by the Japanese Government, a further approach should be made to the Australian Government with a view to persuading them to agree to the release of the 330 Japanese seamen concerned.

5. The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs said that it was proposed that the Government should put down a positive motion in the following terms:

That this House welcomes the intention of His Majesty's Government, declared in the White Paper presented to Parliament, to establish a comprehensive National Health Service.

The debate, which would extend over two days, would be opened by the Minister of Health and the Secretary of State for Scotland

National Health Service.

(Previous Reference: W.M. (44) 21st Conclusions, Minute 2.)
would wind up. The Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Health, would speak during the debate. It was proposed to have a simultaneous debate on the White Paper in the House of Lords.

The question was raised whether by putting down a positive motion the Government might be setting a precedent which would prove awkward in the case of more contentious White Papers. The general view was, however, that the course proposed, which was in line with what had been done on the White Paper on Education, need not bind the Government on a future occasion.

The War Cabinet—

Approved the arrangements proposed by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs for the discussion of the Health Service White Paper in Parliament.

Food.

Reduction of Cheese Ration.

6. The Minister of Food said that, owing to shortage of supplies of cheese, the cheese ration for non-priority consumers would have to be reduced from 3 ozs. to 2 ozs. per week for a period of 20 weeks from the beginning of April. During this period consumers would be receiving larger supplies of milk. In addition, it was proposed to issue extra quantities of canned meat and fish under the points scheme, and to raise the purchasing power of points from 20 to 24. The protein intake would thus be kept up.

The War Cabinet—

Took note of this statement.

Service Pay and Allowances.

(Previous Question by Mr. Kendall, M.P., asking whether he was in a position to implement the promised investigation into Army Pay and Allowances, what would be the constitution of the group to be invited to discuss the problem, and whether any invitations had yet been extended.)

In discussion, it was agreed that it was important to avoid any suggestion that the group invited to discuss the problem would be in any sense a representative body. In 1942 the discussions had taken place with a number of M.P.'s who were interested in the matter, and this position should be maintained.

It was also agreed that it was important that the reply given should emphasise the reservations made by the Leader of the House on the 2nd March and, in particular, that the discussions were without any commitment.

The War Cabinet agreed that a reply should be given on the following lines:

"No, Sir. My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House suggested that the same kind of informal discussions which took place in 1942 might be repeated. Arrangements to give effect to this undertaking, subject to the reservations set forth by my right hon. Friend, will be made through the usual channels."

Offices of the War Cabinet, S.W. 1,
6th March, 1944.