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SECRET.

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W.M. (44)

42nd Conclusions.

WAR CABINET 42 (44).

CONCLUSIONS of a Meeting of the War Cabinet held at 10 Downing Street Annexe, S.W. 1, on Tuesday, 28th March, 1944, at 10 p.m.

Present :

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

The Right Hon. C. R. ATTLEE, M.P.,
Lord President of the Council.

The Right Hon. ANTHONY EDEN, M.P.,
Secretary of State for Foreign
Affairs.

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

The Right Hon. ERNEST BEVIN, M.P.,
Minister of Labour and National
Service.

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

The Right Hon. LORD WOOLTON,
Minister of Reconstruction.

The following were also present :

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. Sir STAFFORD CRIPPS,
K.C., M.P., Minister of Aircraft
Production.

The Right Hon. R. A. BUTLER, M.P.,
President of the Board of Education.

The Right Hon. BRENDAN BRACKEN,
M.P., Minister of Information.

The Right Hon. JAMES STUART, M.P.,
Joint Parliamentary Secretary,
Treasury.

The Right Hon. W. WHITELEY, M.P.,
Joint Parliamentary Secretary,
Treasury.

Secretariat :

Sir EDWARD BRIDGES.
Mr. W. S. MURRIE.

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Education Bill.

(Previous Reference: W.M.(43)166th Conclusions, Minute 8.)

The War Cabinet discussed the situation which had arisen as a result of the Government having been defeated that evening, by 117 votes to 116, on an amendment moved by Mrs. Cazalet-Keir, M.P., to Clause 82 of the Education Bill, that the Minister of Education, in approving salary scales, should not differentiate between men and women solely on the grounds of sex.

The President of the Board of Education explained that Clause 82 had been included in the Bill to meet the views of the teachers. The Clause enabled the Minister to secure that the remuneration paid to teachers was in accordance with the scales recommended by the Burnham Committees—independent bodies representing both teachers and local authorities. The result of the amendment carried against the Government was to put the Minister in a position in which he had to interfere with the proceedings of the Burnham Committees to the extent of requiring them to fix scales applicable equally to men and women. Both he and his predecessors had always avoided any interference with the proceedings of the Burnham Committees, on the ground that bodies of this kind must have complete freedom to reach their own decisions.

It was clear that the supporters of the amendment, and in particular the Tory Reform Group, had seized the opportunity of raising the question of equal pay on Clause 82 of the Education Bill because they saw no prospect of raising it at any other time. He had made the seriousness of the situation plain to the House so that those who voted for the amendment could not be in any doubt as to the consequences of the vote.

The President added that, from the point of view of administration, it would be possible to omit the Clause altogether from the Bill without any embarrassment.

The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs agreed that the President of the Board of Education had so handled the situation that none of the members present could have failed to realise the implications of a vote against the Government. His impression was that after the vote there had been a change in feeling among those members who had supported the amendment, and an attempt had been made to suggest that the Government should not treat the matter as one of confidence, but should consider whether they might not acquiesce in the decision of the House. He had made it clear that, while the Government accepted the proposal to report progress, he could give no undertaking whatsoever as to the Government's attitude.

The Prime Minister pointed out that the Government were committed to formidable military operations in the near future. This incident might well have a most damaging effect on opinion abroad, and it was essential that prompt measures should be taken to make it clear beyond any doubt that the Government had the full support of Parliament. The great majority of members were with the Government, and, if the issue was treated as a major one of confidence, he was sure that the effect would be salutary.

The Lord President of the Council said that the situation which had arisen was the culmination of a course of irresponsible conduct pursued by certain members of the House. He fully endorsed what the Prime Minister had said.

The Minister of Labour and National Service agreed that the question must be treated as a major issue of confidence. Any sign of weakness on the part of the Government would have the worst possible effect on industrial relations. He agreed with the President of the Board of Education that it would be disastrous to depart from the principle of non-interference with the decisions of independent tribunals on wage questions.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer pointed out that the deputation which he had received in the previous week on the subject of equal pay had not pressed for the immediate application of the

principle, but only that it should form a feature of the post-war Civil Service.

Further discussion showed complete agreement that the President of the Board of Education could have taken no other line, and that the matter must be treated as a major issue of confidence.

The War Cabinet then turned to the question of the procedure to be adopted in the House. There was general assent to the view that no time should be lost in restoring the position. It was felt, however, that it would be advantageous to allow one day to elapse in order to enable members who were out of London to return.

The President of the Board of Education pointed out that, as a result of the proposed procedure, at least one day of those set aside for the Committee Stage of the Education Bill would be lost. He was most anxious that, if at all possible, the Committee Stage should be completed by Easter.

It was agreed that the possibility of sitting for an extra day for this purpose should be borne in mind.

The War Cabinet's conclusions were as follows:—

- (1) The line taken by the President of the Board of Education in dealing with Mrs. Cazalet-Keir's amendment was cordially endorsed.
- (2) At the meeting of the House on the following day, Wednesday, the 29th March, the Prime Minister would make a statement emphasising that the Government felt that at this serious stage of the war there must be no doubt of the support which they enjoyed from the House of Commons. There would therefore have to be an alteration in Government business.
- (3) The Prime Minister's statement would proceed to indicate the procedure to be followed when the Committee Stage of the Bill was resumed on the following day, Thursday, the 30th March. The Government would then oppose the Motion that the Clause, as amended, should stand as part of the Bill, and this would be treated as a vote of confidence. In the same way, when the Report Stage of the Bill was reached the Government would move to restore the Clause as it originally stood in the Bill. This also would be treated as a vote of confidence. After the Prime Minister's statement had been made, the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs would move the adjournment of the House.
- (4) The Prime Minister, the Lord President of the Council, the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, the President of the Board of Education and the Joint Chief Whips were invited to settle the terms of the draft statement referred to in (2) and (3).
- (5) The Joint Chief Whips were invited to take steps to ensure a full attendance in the House on Thursday, the 30th March.
- (6) The Prime Minister, the Lord President of the Council, the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and the President of the Board of Education would speak on behalf of the Government in the Debate on Thursday, the 30th March.

*Offices of the War Cabinet, S.W. 1,
29th March, 1944.*
