CONCLUSIONS of a Meeting of the War Cabinet held at 10 Downing Street, S.W. 1, on Wednesday, 5th April, 1944, at 6.30 p.m.

Present:

The Right Hon. WINSTON S. CHURCHILL, M.P., Prime Minister (in the Chair) (Items 3-4).

The Right Hon. C. R. ATTLEE, M.P., Lord President of the Council (in the Chair) (Items 1-2).

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

The Right Hon. OLIVER LYTTELTON, M.P., Minister of Production (Items 3-4).

The Right Hon. LORD WOOLTON, Minister of Reconstruction.

The following were also present:

The Right Hon. VISCOUNT CRANBORNE, Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs (Items 3-4).


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

The Right Hon. Sir ANDREW DUNCAN, M.P., Minister of Supply (Items 1-3).

The Right Hon. LORD LEATHERS, Minister of War Transport (Items 1-3).

Major the Right Hon. G. LLOYD GEORGE, M.P., Minister of Fuel and Power (Items 1-3).

The Right Hon. L. S. AMERY, M.P., Secretary of State for India and Secretary of State for Burma (Items 3-4).

The Right Hon. Sir JAMES GRIGG, M.P., Secretary of State for War.

The Right Hon. THOMAS JOHNSTON, M.P., Secretary of State for Scotland (Item 4).


The Right Hon. LORD PORTAL, Minister of Works (Item 2).

The Right Hon. BRENDAN BRACKEN, M.P., Minister of Information.
The Right Hon. LORD CHERWELL, Paymaster-General (Items 3-4).

Mr. A. T. LENNOX-BOYD, M.P., Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Aircraft Production (Item 3).

Admiral of the Fleet Sir ANDREW CUNNINGHAM, First Sea Lord and Chief of Naval Staff (Items 1-2).

Air Marshal Sir DOUGLAS EVILL, Vice-Chief of the Air Staff (Items 1-2).

Lieutenant-General A. E. NYE, Vice-Chief of the Imperial General Staff (Items 1-2).

Secretariat:

Sir EDWARD BRIDGES.
Lieutenant-General Sir HASTINGS L. ISMAY.
Sir GILBERT LAITHWAITE.
Mr. W. S. MURRIE.

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**WAR CABINET 45 (44).**

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Oil

Discussions with the United States: Instructions to Official Delegation.

(Previous Reference: W.M.(44)37th Conclusions, Minute 4.)

1. Following the conclusions of the War Cabinet at their meeting on the 21st March, 1944, a Ministerial Oil Committee had been appointed by the Prime Minister on the 28th March, under the Chairmanship of the Minister of War Transport (the other members being the Minister of State, the Financial Secretary to the Treasury, the Chairman of the Oil Control Board, and representatives of the First Lord of the Admiralty and the Secretary of State for India), to consider, in the first place, the terms of the instructions to the Official United Kingdom Delegation to Washington for the forthcoming discussions on oil.

The War Cabinet now had before them: (i) a Report (W.P. (44) 179) by the Ministerial Oil Committee, setting out their recommendations as to the instructions to be given to the Official Oil Delegation; (ii) a Report by the Chiefs of Staff on the strategic aspects of the forthcoming discussions (C.O.S. (44) 322 (O)).

The Minister of War Transport said that the undertakings that had been received from the United States Government made it unlikely that issues involving existing rights or properties in oil, or the transfer of oil products without payment, would be raised. It would be the business of the Delegation to see that the discussion was not limited to the Middle East, but was directed to consideration of the world position. The position as regards Service requirements was fully protected. While the authority given to the Delegation was very limited in character, he believed that there was an opportunity of an arrangement being arrived at which would be advantageous to this country, and that there was good reason for examining certain of the questions which the United States Government desired to raise.

The First Sea Lord said that, from the strategic point of view, the Chiefs of Staff supported the draft Instructions, and had reached the conclusion that, on balance, it would be to our advantage that the United States should have an interest and hence a strategic commitment in the Middle East oilfields.

In the discussion the following points were made:

(a) The Chancellor of the Exchequer said that the Treasury would have preferred that Instruction (1) should have spoken of "ascertaining the views of the United States Delegation as to possible bases" rather than "exploring possible bases." The Instructions as at present drafted might suggest that the two Delegations were to collaborate in finding bases of agreement. In reply, it was pointed out that the discretion given to the Delegation under their Instructions was strictly limited and could hardly well be further reduced. Moreover, we had agreed in the correspondence leading up to its despatch that these conversations should be exploratory. It seemed doubtful, therefore, whether any amendment was really necessary.

(b) The Lord President of the Council suggested that Instruction (5) might be read as committing His Majesty's Government to a general support of particular oil interests. It was urged, on the other hand, that there was definite advantage in an arrangement on these lines, and in placing the onus, so far as practicable, on the Governments concerned of ensuring that the general conduct of enterprises of this nature followed the right lines. The recent conduct of the Mexican Government in oil matters had brought out the possible advantage from our point of view of arrangements such as those now suggested.

(c) The point was raised that the United States Government might refer to the provisions of the Atlantic Charter as regards access to raw material. It was urged that the alternative to an arrangement such as that outlined in the Instructions was an international scramble for oil which might well be more dangerous to world peace than the measures of control which would result from
close collaboration on oil questions between the United States and the United Kingdom.

The War Cabinet—

(i) Took note of the Report of the Ministerial Oil Committee and approved the Instructions to the Official Oil Delegation to Washington recommended by them.

(ii) Took note of the Report by the Chiefs of Staff on the strategic aspects of the forthcoming discussions.

2. The War Cabinet had before them a Memorandum by the Minister of Production (W.P. (44) 182) proposing a temporary embargo on new building projects in order to ease the burden on inland transport.

The Memorandum explained that early in March Departments had been asked to plan for a reduction of 10 per cent. in their demands on transport for building materials and to review their new building projects in the light of the theory of maximum impact during 1944. Since then the Ministry of Production, in conjunction with the other Departments concerned, had explored the possibility of making greater savings, and had come to the conclusion that the most effective step which could be taken would be to place a temporary embargo on all new building projects which had not started by the end of the present week. The question of continuing the embargo would be reviewed at the end of April and it would not apply to maintenance work or to works of less than £5,000 value. Exceptions would also be granted for operational works which would be ready in time for forthcoming operations and for certain other projects. The labour released by the embargo would be used for transport and other urgent operational needs and for essential housing repairs. Decisions on claims for exemption from the embargo would be made by the Minister of Production through the machinery of the Ministry of Works.

The Minister of War Transport said that he strongly supported the proposed embargo. Coupled with the zoning system already introduced for building materials, it would enable a very substantial saving to be made in inland transport.

The Secretary of State for War said that he assumed that the Service Departments would be entitled to decide what works must be regarded as essential for forthcoming operations and that the question of what projects fell within this class would not be left to the decision of the Ministry of Works.

The Secretary of State for Air and the First Lord of the Admiralty said that they accepted the scheme, subject to one or two particular points, on which they were in correspondence with the Minister of Production.

The Minister of Works said that, subject to one or two points of detail, the proposals in W.P. (44) 182 had been agreed with the Production Departments. In paragraph 8 of the Memorandum the Minister of Production offered to consult with his colleagues on any special procedure that might prove to be required for the adjudication of claims for exemption on grounds of operational importance. The embargo would not hold up work on the repair of war-damaged houses, since only projects costing more than £5,000 were affected by it.

The War Cabinet—

(1) Approved the proposals in W.P. (44) 182 for the imposition of a temporary embargo on new building projects, subject to the exemptions mentioned in the Memorandum.

(2) Agreed that the question of the continuance of the embargo should be raised at the end of April.
3. The War Cabinet discussed the situation in the coal industry.

The Minister of Fuel and Power reported that there had been a considerable improvement in the position in Yorkshire and that there was reason to hope that the strike was breaking up. If work was fully resumed next week, it would be possible to keep all the major gas works going and the railways and electricity generating stations would not be affected. There would, however, be a substantial loss of production in the coke ovens.

In view of the interest shown by Members in the situation and of the fact that the House would not meet again until after Easter, he proposed to make a statement after Questions on the following day. It was not intended that there should be any debate on this statement.

The Minister referred particularly to the tendency which had shown itself in the Press to blame the Government for the recent troubles in the coal industry. In fact, the Porter Tribunal was an independent body and there was no alternative to accepting their award. The Minister of Information had explained this to Lobby correspondents.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer endorsed what the Minister of Fuel and Power had said about the responsibility for the unsettled state of the coal industry. There was no foundation for the suggestion, which had been made to him by certain Members of Parliament, that the industry, if left alone, could have worked out the application of the Porter Award satisfactorily. In fact, the Government had had to step in in order to prevent the two sides of the industry from throwing an unwarranted burden on the Coal Charges Account.

The Minister of Labour and National Service said that he had discussed the question of industrial stoppages with the T.U.C. earlier in the day and had obtained their support for a new Defence Regulation, which had been approved in principle by the Lord President's Committee, to enable action to be taken against instigators of strikes. There was definite evidence that members of a political organisation were fomenting trouble, especially in the Sheffield area, and the question whether action could be taken against them, either under the Trade Disputes and Trades Union Act, 1927, or by the use of Defence Regulation 18B, was being examined. He had considered whether it would be possible to call up young miners who were on strike for service in the Forces. In view, however, of the man-power situation in the industry and of the fact that youths were being directed into mining instead of being called up to the Forces, it was impossible to take this course.

The Home Secretary and Minister of Home Security said that his information suggested that the organisation referred to by the Minister of Labour and National Service had from 1,500 to 2,000 members. Certain documents which had come into the possession of the Home Office were now being examined with a view to deciding whether action could be taken under existing powers.

The War Cabinet—

(1) Took note of the report made by the Minister of Fuel and Power on the situation in Yorkshire and of the action which was being taken by the Minister of Labour and National Service and the Home Secretary and Minister of Home Security against instigators of strikes.

(2) Agreed that on the following day the Minister of Fuel and Power should make a statement in the House on the situation in Yorkshire. The statement should not include any reference to the proposed action against instigators of strikes.
4. The War Cabinet had before them a Memorandum by the Lord President of the Council (W.P. (44) 180) about the allocation of doctors to the Services in 1944. The requirements of the Services, including India, for doctors was now put at approximately 2,350. The total allocation was estimated at 1,250 on the assumption that the Services would accept 200 women and alien doctors. This represented the limit of what could be provided, as the medical facilities available to the civilian population had reached a point below which it was not possible to go without serious danger of a breakdown. Moreover, the Services needed fit men of military age.

At a meeting of the Lord President's Committee the Secretary of State for War had made it clear that failure to supply the full number of doctors asked for by the Army (who would receive only just over half their requirements) would, unless forthcoming operations were more immediately successful than we had the right to expect, involve a grave risk of a breakdown in the Army medical service later in the year. Accordingly, the Lord President's Committee, while approving the suggested allocation of 1,250 available doctors between the Services, had asked the Service and Health Ministers to make immediate arrangements for an examination into the possibility of devising a scheme whereby medical personnel in various establishments, Service and civilian alike, would be earmarked for immediate transfer in case of emergency to establishments where a breakdown or loss of efficiency would have the most serious consequences.

Attention was also drawn to the fact that some months ago the United States War Department had undertaken to supply us with equipped and staffed field hospitals with 8,000 beds. It now appeared that this undertaking would not be fulfilled, and it was suggested in the Lord President's Memorandum that a further approach should be made to the United States Government on a very high level.

Points raised in discussion:

(a) The Minister of Health said that he had heard that there were 80 Danish doctors now in Sweden who were ready to come over here. He suggested that steps should be taken at once to get particulars in order to find out which of them would be suitable for employment in this country. This was agreed to.

(b) It was reported that there was some uncertainty as to the precise scope and purpose of the examination which the Lord President's Committee had suggested should be arranged by the Service and Health Ministers, and that a direction from the War Cabinet would be helpful.

(c) The Prime Minister emphasised that, if we were to sustain heavy casualties over a considerable period, the Services must be ready to accept a dilution of fully trained personnel, and a departure from the high standards which were appropriate in other circumstances. Only in this way would the best use be made of the available personnel.

The War Cabinet's conclusions were as follows:

(1) The allocation of doctors to the Services approved by the Lord President's Committee, as set out in paragraph 1 of W.P. (44) 180, was endorsed.

(2) The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs undertook, in consultation with the Minister of Health, to instruct our Ambassador at Stockholm to obtain particulars which would enable us to settle which of the Danish doctors now in Sweden were suitable for employment in this country, and to take the necessary steps to bring over those adjudged suitable as soon as possible.

(3) The enquiry asked for by the Lord President's Committee should be carried out by the Chief Medical Officers of the Ministry of Health and the Department of Health for Scotland and the Medical Directors-General of the three Services. The representative of the Minister of Health should preside.
(4) The purpose of this examination was to prepare a scheme, capable of application at short notice in an emergency, whereby medical personnel, Service and civilian, would be earmarked for transfer to those establishments and Services where the results of a breakdown would be most serious. The fact that officers were so earmarked for transfer in an emergency did not imply that their services were not being fully and economically utilised in their present appointments.

(5) The Service Ministers should also consider what steps could be taken by way of further dilution of personnel, or a lowering of standards, in the event of a threatened breakdown.

(6) The Secretary of State for War undertook to provide the Prime Minister with material for a telegram to send to the President, explaining our serious shortage of medical personnel, and asking for help from the United States, whether by way of the provision of fully equipped and staffed field hospitals, or by the supply of medical man-power in other ways.

Offices of the War Cabinet, S.W. 1,

5th April, 1944.