WAR CABINET 75 (44).

CONCLUSIONS of a Meeting of the War Cabinet held at 10 Downing Street, S.W. 1, on Monday, 12th June, 1944, at 6 p.m.

Present:

The Right Hon. C. R. Attlee, M.P., Deputy Prime Minister (in the Chair).

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

The Right Hon. Lord Leathers, Minister of War Transport (Items 6 and 7).

The Right Hon. Brendan Bracken, Minister of Information.

The Right Hon. James Stuart, M.P., Joint Parliamentary Secretary, Treasury (Item 7).

The following were also present:

The Right Hon. Peter Fraser, M.P., Prime Minister of New Zealand (Items 1–3).

The Right Hon. Sir Firoz Khan Noon, Representative of the Government of India (Items 1–3).

The Right Hon. Lord Beaverbrook, Lord Privy Seal.


The Right Hon. Lord Cherwell, Paymaster-General.

His Highness the Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir, representative of the Government of India (Items 1–3).

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 Stafford Cripps, K.C., M.P., Minister of Aircraft Production.

The Right Hon. Lord Portal, Minister of Works (Items 5–7).

The Right Hon. W. Whiteley, M.P., Joint Parliamentary Secretary, Treasury (Item 7).
The Hon. Sir ALEXANDER CADOGAN, Permanent Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs (Items 1-3).

Marshal of the Royal Air Force Sir CHARLES F. A. PORTAL, Chief of the Air Staff (Items 1-3).

Admiral of the Fleet Sir ANDREW CUNNINGHAM, First Sea Lord and Chief of Naval Staff (Items 1-3).

Lieutenant-General A. E. NYE, Vice-Chief of the Imperial General Staff (Items 1-3).

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(Previous Reference:
W.M. (44) 72nd Conclusions,
Minute 2.)

The Chiefs of Staff reported the events of the previous week.

Except for 200 sorties by Mosquitoes over Germany, the whole of the Metropolitan Air Force had been engaged on the "Overlord" operation. Despite rather unfavourable weather, the Allied Air Forces had been able—

(a) to maintain air superiority and prevent interference from the German Air Force;

(b) to deliver the airborne force in the battle area; and

(c) to neutralise enemy coastal batteries and Radar installations.

Since the first assault our short-range fighters had been mainly used to support the battle, and our bombers to attack road and railway communications well behind the battle area. Five landing strips were now in use in France.

Enemy losses claimed for the previous seven days had been 289 aircraft destroyed; our losses amounted to 480 aircraft (245 British and 235 United States).

In the Mediterranean theatre 16,300 sorties had been flown as against 1,100 by the enemy, all of these latter being in defence of Southern Germany and the Balkans. Enemy losses had been 89 aircraft as against 122 Allied losses.

The total sinkings by enemy action during May now amounted to 27,297 tons. During the previous week confirmed losses due to enemy action, including "Overlord" losses, amounted to 15,272 tons. The Allied naval losses in "Overlord" had been much less than anticipated, and amounted to 4 destroyers, 1 frigate, 2 minesweepers, 1 Headquarters Ship, 4 L.S.T. and 3 Coastal Force craft.

The build-up on the beaches was proceeding satisfactorily.

The Vice-Chief of the Imperial General Staff described the Operations in North-West France. The United States Forces on the east side of the Cherbourg Peninsula were outflanking Montebourg and had captured Carentan. Further to the east, the Americans were now advancing south of Colombières; and had captured the Forest of Cerisy. The British, in the neighbourhood of Bayeux, had reached Hottot and Tilly-sur-Seulles. Canadians advancing on Caen had met considerable opposition in the early stages of the battle, but were now astride the Caen–Bayeux road. The Germans were putting in strong counter-attacks north and west of Caen and it was unlikely that we should endeavour to try to take the town by frontal assault. The build-up on the beach-heads was now only very little behind schedule. 9,000 prisoners had so far been taken.

In Italy there had been virtually no enemy opposition on the left and right flanks, although in the centre, resistance had increased as our forces moved forward into the mountains. There were indications that the enemy might attempt to hold up the advance of the 5th Army round Grosseto. 25,000 prisoners had been taken since the 11th May.

In the attack in the Karelian Isthmus the Russians claimed to have advanced 15 miles on a front of 25 miles.

The War Cabinet—

Took note of these statements.

The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs said that he understood that the Russian Admiral who had been sent to this country to take over the warships which we had lent to Russia had adopted a very difficult attitude.

The First Lord of the Admiralty confirmed that this was so, and undertook to consider and report to the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs whether the matter ought to be taken up officially with the Russian Government.
3. The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs informed the War Cabinet that there had been no material progress in the discussions about the control of civil affairs in France. General de Gaulle had not been prepared to invite Commissioners from Algiers to come to this country for talks in the absence of American participation. He had suggested that conversations should take place with M. Vienot. It was perhaps for consideration whether we should not try to work out something on the official level with M. Vienot which could afterwards be shown to the United States. But conversations on this level did not seem likely to improve the position, vis-à-vis the United States Government. He proposed to consult the Prime Minister as to the next step.

The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs reported that the Belgian Prime Minister had asked him for advice as to the line to be taken on a note from the French National Committee to the various Allies, indicating that they had constituted themselves a provisional Government of France. Similar soundings had been taken by the Dutch and the Poles. The French communication had not in fact asked for recognition and he (the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs) was endeavouring to persuade those of our Allies who had consulted him to content themselves with taking note of it, and adding that the relations they had previously had with the French Committee of National Liberation they would now have with the new body. Russia was still, so far as he was aware, like the United States and ourselves, reluctant to recognise the French National Committee as a provisional Government.

The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs informed the War Cabinet that the establishment of a new Government under Signor Bonomi had been entirely unexpected. The Allied Governments had never contemplated any change at this stage. The intention had been that the Italian leaders after a short visit to Rome should return to Naples. Our position was weak inasmuch as they had not in terms been informed that they must consult us before taking any action in this matter. Furthermore, General Mason Macfarlane had acquiesced in the action taken. It was important now to ensure that the new Government accepted the obligations which had been accepted by General Badoglio. The whole matter was likely to be discussed in the Advisory Council for Italy on the following day.

The War Cabinet—
Took note of this statement.

4. The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs informed the War Cabinet that the Chief Rabbi had written to the Prime Minister to suggest that His Majesty's Government should declare all Jews in enemy territory to be British-protected persons. The difficulties in accepting any such proposal were, in the judgment of the Foreign Office, insuperable. Nor was there any reason to think that its acceptance would in any way improve the position of the Jews. The Prime Minister had been anxious, however, that the War Cabinet should be aware of the position before a negative reply was sent to the Chief Rabbi.

The War Cabinet—
Agreed that a negative reply should be sent to the Chief Rabbi; and asked that a copy of the correspondence should thereafter be circulated for their information.
The War Cabinet had before them—

(i) a Memorandum by the Chancellor of the Exchequer (W.P. (44) 302); and

(ii) a Memorandum by the Minister of Information (W.P. (44) 308)

regarding the offer by the Duke of Wellington to the Government of part of Apsley House and the Wellington heirlooms.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer explained that the Duke of Wellington had offered to place at the disposal of the Government a substantial part of the accommodation in Apsley House together with a selection of the pictures, plate and relics originally the property of the First Duke. The premises were vested in a body of Trustees, including the Prime Minister, the Speaker of the House of Commons and himself (the Chancellor of the Exchequer), and the proposal had not yet been considered by the Trustees as such. The Directors of the National Gallery, the Victoria and Albert Museum, the National Portrait Gallery and the Wallace Collection had been consulted informally and strongly recommended the acceptance of the Duke’s offer. It was estimated that the value of the property offered was at least one million pounds, a large part of which represented the value of the pictures. The offer was conditional on the family’s retaining for its use, free of rent and rates, part of the basement, part of the ground floor and the second and third floors of Apsley House. The rental value of the space in Apsley House to be retained by the family was estimated at £1,250, the rates on which would be about £550. If the offer were accepted, about £25,000 would have to be spent on redecorating, repairs and modern heating, lighting and sanitary installations; while the annual expenditure in maintaining the building providing for the custody of the exhibits would be of the order of £6,000 a year. He had agreed with the Minister of Works that the offer was one that should be accepted, subject to the approval of the Trustees and to certain arrangements on points of detail, and he sought the concurrence of the War Cabinet before proceeding further.

The Minister of Information doubted whether the offer was one that the Government should accept. He was not satisfied that the expenditure of £25,000 in repairing and redecorating Apsley House, £6,000 a year on the maintenance of the building and of the custody of the exhibits and the amount involved in relieving the Duke of rates and taxes, would be justified by the return. The acceptance of the offer might create an awkward precedent and there were other houses (e.g., Bridgewater House) where a bargain of the kind proposed would be of greater advantage. He also doubted whether it was wise to add another to the many scattered museums in London and suggested that it would be preferable if some arrangement could be made to exhibit at the National Gallery the more valuable pictures included in the Duke’s collection. He agreed with the Chancellor of the Exchequer that a better setting was desirable for Government receptions but urged that instead of using Apsley House for this purpose, the Government should restore the Banqueting Hall of the Palace of Whitehall.

The following points arose in discussion—

(a) It was pointed out that the offer made by the Duke included pictures of very great value. If the offer were not accepted the Duke might be driven to propose the sale of some of the pictures and it would be difficult, if not impossible, for the Trustees to refuse their consent.

(b) The proposal to use the Banqueting Hall for Government hospitality would involve finding other accommodation for the Royal United Services Institution. The cost of displacing the Institution might amount to as much as £300,000. The suggestion was made that it might be possible to arrange to transfer the Royal United Services Institution to Apsley House, thus leaving the Banqueting Hall available for the purposes of Government hospitality.
There was general agreement that the question whether the Duke's offer should be accepted should be decided without reference to the question whether some more suitable accommodation than Lancaster House ought to be made available for Government hospitality, or whether Apsley House could be used for this purpose. It was also generally felt that, more particularly in view of the value of the pictures, the Duke's offer was generous and merited very serious consideration. The offer would, however, be more acceptable if the Duke were prepared to put some limit on the period for which the family would retain the use of part of the premises, free of rent and rates. It might also be of advantage if some arrangement could be made whereby the pictures might be available for loan to public galleries.

The War Cabinet—

Invited the Minister of Works to express to the Duke of Wellington the Government's appreciation of his offer, and to discuss the matter with him further with a view to ascertaining whether, if it were accepted, he would be willing to agree (i) to some limit on the period for which the family would retain the right to occupy part of the premises, free of rent and rates, and (ii) to an arrangement under which the pictures would be available for loan to public galleries. The Minister of Works might also find out whether the Duke would be prepared to consider a proposal to transfer the Royal United Services Institution from the Banqueting Hall to Apsley House.

6. The War Cabinet had before them a memorandum by the Home Secretary and Minister of Home Security (W.P. (44) 312) on the question whether, in view of recent restrictions on rail transport, any further curtailment of horse-racing was called for.

The Home Secretary and Minister of Home Security said that he had discussed the matter with the Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries who agreed with his view that on balance the case for further restrictions was not strong.

The Secretary of State for War said that he found difficulty in reconciling the Home Secretary's proposal with the decision to ration concession travel by wives and dependants of Service personnel.

The Minister of War Transport said that no extra trains were now run on account of races, and while races resulted in some additional inconvenience to other passengers, the stopping of racing would not release any trains or rolling stock for other purposes.

The War Cabinet—

Expressed general concurrence with the views set out in the Memorandum by the Home Secretary and Minister of Home Security.

7. The War Cabinet was informed that it was proposed that the following Motion should be put down on the occasion of this debate:

"That this House welcomes the intention of His Majesty's Government, declared in the White Paper on Employment Policy, to accept as one of their primary aims and responsibilities the maintenance of a high and stable level of employment after the war; and endorses the broad lines of policy set out in the White Paper."
The War Cabinet—

(1) approved the terms of the proposed Motion;
(2) agreed that the debate should take place in the following week;
(3) expressed the hope that it would not be found necessary to allow more than two days for the debate, but agreed that if a third day should prove necessary, this could only be made available by taking a supply day;
(4) agreed that the Government speakers in the debate should be settled at the meeting of the War Cabinet on the following day.

*Offices of the War Cabinet, S.W. 1,*
12th June, 1944.