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SECRET.

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W.M. (44)

126th Conclusions.

WAR CABINET 126 (44).

CONCLUSIONS of a Meeting of the War Cabinet held at 10 Downing Street, S.W. 1, on Monday, 25th September, 1944, at 12 noon.

Present :

- | | |
|---|---|
| The Right Hon. C. R. ATTLEE, M.P., Deputy Prime Minister (<i>in the Chair</i>). | |
| 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. HERBERT MORRISON,
M.P., Secretary of State for the
Home Department and Minister of
Home Security. | The Right Hon. LORD WOOLTON,
Minister of Reconstruction. |

The following were also present :

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| The Right Hon. VISCOUNT CRANBORNE,
Secretary of State for Dominion
Affairs. | The Right Hon. LORD BEAVERBROOK,
Lord Privy Seal. |
| Colonel the Right Hon. OLIVER
STANLEY, M.P., Secretary of State
for the Colonies (<i>Items 3-5</i>). | The Right Hon. Sir JAMES GRIGG,
M.P., Secretary of State for War. |
| The Right Hon. Sir ARCHIBALD
SINCLAIR, Bt., M.P., Secretary of
State for Air. | The Right Hon. THOMAS JOHNSTON,
M.P., Secretary of State for Scotland
(<i>Items 1-4</i>). |
| The Right Hon. Sir STAFFORD CRIPPS,
K.C., M.P., Minister of Aircraft
Production. | The Right Hon. H. U. WILLINK, K.C.,
M.P., Minister of Health (<i>Items 1-4</i>). |
| The Right Hon. W. S. MORRISON, K.C.,
M.P., Minister of Town and Country
Planning (<i>Items 1-4</i>). | LORD BRUNTISFIELD, Parliamentary
Secretary, Admiralty (<i>Item 4</i>). |

The Right Hon. GEORGE HICKS, M.P.,
Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of
Works (*Items 2-4*).

Secretariat :

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

WAR CABINET 126 (44).

CONTENTS.		
<i>Minute No.</i>	<i>Subject.</i>	<i>Page.</i>
1	Unemployment Insurance	71
2	Housing	71
3	Town and Country Planning.....	74
4	Housing	74
	London Housing Situation.	
5	Closer Union between Southern and Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland	76
6	Proposed College for Aeronautics	77
7	Italy	77
8	Travel Facilities	77
	Visits by Non-Official Civilians to Paris.	
9	Re-allocation of Industrial Capacity	78

Unemployment Insurance.

(Previous Reference: W.M.(48)144th Conclusions, Minute 2.)

1. The War Cabinet had before them a memorandum by the Minister of Labour and National Service (W.P. (44) 535) proposing legislation to increase the rates of unemployment benefit.

The Minister of Labour and National Service stressed the importance of ensuring that adequate provision was made for persons who found themselves unemployed during any dislocation due to the change-over of production from war to peace. It was proposed that the new rates, which were set forth in paragraph 2 of W.P. (44) 535, should come into force at the end of hostilities in Europe. The Government Actuary had agreed that, in view of the short-term nature of the proposals, it would be proper in the present circumstances to refrain from making any increase in the rate of contribution. It was proposed to make one further small modification in the rate for married women, the effect of which would be to entitle a married woman, who wholly or mainly maintained an infirm husband, to receive 22s. a week instead of 20s.

The Secretary of State for Scotland pointed out that the proposals would increase the disparity between rates of sickness benefit and of unemployment benefit. He hoped that the presentation of these proposals would be done in such a way as to allay any dissatisfaction at this disparity.

The War Cabinet

Authorised the Minister of Labour and National Service to introduce legislation increasing the rates of unemployment benefit on the lines proposed in W.P. (44) 535.

Housing.

(Previous Reference: W.M.(44)25th Conclusions, Minute 3.)

2. The War Cabinet had before them a Memorandum by the Minister of Reconstruction (W.P.(44) 536) covering the report of the Committee appointed by the Prime Minister to make a plan for the production of prefabricated houses.

The Minister of Reconstruction explained that the note appended to paragraph 8 giving Lord Portal's estimate of the number of houses which the programme proposed would produce by the 31st December, 1946, did not form part of the Lord Privy Seal's report.

The Lord Privy Seal pointed out that the Committee had come to the conclusion that, provided that there was no delay in putting in hand the production of Portal steel houses, about 50,000 could be secured within two years of the launching of the programme. The Committee also recommended that orders should be given for the production of Uniseco houses (asbestos cement on a timber frame) and Arcon houses (asbestos cement on a light steel frame). The firms concerned estimated that about 100,000 of these houses could be produced within two years of the launching of the scheme. The Committee felt that in the absence of any method of checking the estimates they must be accepted. The Committee had also examined the Tarran house (concrete panels on a timber frame) and recommended that it should be rejected. The Committee stressed the importance of planning the production without delay, of securing an adequate flow of labour for the erection of the temporary houses on the site, and the utmost drive and resource in carrying out the programme. They regarded the programme as inadequate for the needs of the population and suggested that new projects for the provision of temporary accommodation should be undertaken at once.

The War Cabinet discussed first the *size of the temporary house programme*.

It was urged, on the one hand, that the production of 150,000 temporary houses in two years was inadequate for our needs, and the question was raised whether more houses of the Portal, Uniseco and Arcon types could not be secured. The use of other firms to produce

houses of the Uniseco and Arcon types, the employment of the Tarran firm, subject to the making of satisfactory financial arrangements, and the possibilities of other types (*e.g.*, the Braithwaite three-storey flat unit) should be explored.

On the other hand, stress was laid on the fact that the main public demand was for permanent houses. While there would be no objection to increasing the programme of temporary houses to, say, 250,000, in the first two years, there was a danger that any greater concentration on temporary houses would slow down the production of permanent houses, since both types would be competing for the same fitments and for labour for erection on the site. The Ministry of Works had carried out a promising experiment in the production of a permanent house at Northolt with a great saving in man-hours, and it was urged that it would be better to use labour and materials on this type than to concentrate too much on temporary houses.

Further points in discussion were :—

- (a) *The Lord Privy Seal* confirmed that urgent enquiries were being made into the possibility of designing a house of aluminium construction.
- (b) The Tarran firm had built a house which had received the approval of the Burt Committee on house construction. A model of this house had been erected in an exhibition of temporary houses which was about to be opened at the Tate Gallery. In these circumstances it would be difficult to reject the Tarran house altogether, and it was suggested that the best course might be to state that the possibility of its production on a large scale was being investigated.

This was agreed to.

- (c) *The Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Works*, said that the production of temporary houses would be subject to strict costing arrangements in order to ensure that costs were kept down to a minimum.

The War Cabinet—

- (1) Approved the programme of Portal, Uniseco and Arcon houses proposed in the report circulated with W.P. (44) 536.
- (2) Agreed that the possibility should be explored of supplementing the programme by the production of houses of the Tarran and other types, in so far as this could be done without substantially interfering with the programme of permanent houses.
- (3) Agreed that an announcement based on (1) and (2) might be made during the resumed debate on the Second Reading of the Housing (Temporary Accommodation) Bill.

The War Cabinet next discussed the *production of kitchen units and fitments* for temporary and permanent houses.

The Lord Privy Seal explained that preparations had been made to order 175,000 kitchen units of the standard type required for temporary houses.

Fitments were, of course, required for permanent houses, and the question was raised whether provision for these houses should be made by ordering additional kitchen units together with other standard fitments.

The Minister of Health said that it would be impossible to use the standard temporary house kitchen unit in all the types of permanent houses which local authorities would desire to build. In the Housing Manual which had just been sent to local authorities, however, a substantial measure of standardisation of fitments had been recommended.

The general feeling of the War Cabinet was that every endeavour should be made to secure the maximum standardisation of fitments, and that, although the temporary house kitchen unit might not be suitable for all permanent houses, it should be used wherever possible. Even where it could not be used as a whole, the components might be used separately. Stress was also laid on the importance of placing bulk orders for housing fitments, including fitments for permanent houses, well in advance of the time when they would be required. The question was raised whether this would be feasible if local authorities were given any considerable measure of latitude in selecting the types of permanent house to be built in their areas.

The War Cabinet—

- (4) Agreed that the necessary orders should be given as soon as possible for the production of kitchen units and other fitments for temporary houses;
- (5) Invited the Minister of Health and the Secretary of State for Scotland to examine as a matter of urgency and report to the War Cabinet on the possibility of standardising the fitments for permanent houses and of placing bulk orders for the necessary supplies.

The Minister of Reconstruction raised the question of the procedure for placing orders for the production of temporary houses and of housing fitments. Under the present arrangements too many Departments were concerned. He asked whether, now that the Ministry of Works had given their advice on the question of design, the Health Departments could not in future deal direct with the Ministry of Supply.

The War Cabinet—

- (6) Agreed that this matter required examination, and invited the Minister of Reconstruction to submit his views on the matter to the Prime Minister.

The Secretary of State for Scotland stressed the importance of ensuring that the sites on which the temporary houses would be erected were serviced in good time. Delays had occurred in the servicing of sites, due partly to the difficulty of obtaining adequate technical staffs to supervise the work.

The Minister of Health said that he did not expect any difficulties over the servicing of sites in England and Wales.

The War Cabinet—

- (7) Invited the Secretary of State for Scotland to discuss with the Minister of Labour and National Service the provision of additional technical staffs.

The Minister of Production drew attention to the statement in the Prime Minister's directive (W.P. (44) 188) that the emergency housing programme should be carried out by exceptional methods, on the lines of a military operation. In order to strengthen his own position and that of the Minister of Labour and National Service in face of competing demands for war production and for projects for the reconversion of industry, he asked that the War Cabinet should reaffirm this statement.

The War Cabinet—

- (8) Reaffirmed this statement in the Prime Minister's directive of the 5th April, 1944.

The War Cabinet discussed the arrangements for the resumed debate on the Second Reading of the Housing (Temporary Accommodation) Bill.

The War Cabinet—

- (9) Agreed that the Secretary of State for Scotland should open the debate and that the Minister of Production should wind up.

**Town and
Country
Planning Bill.**

(Previous
Reference:
W.M. (44)89th
Conclusions,
Minute 6.)

3. The War Cabinet had before them a memorandum by the Minister of Town and Country Planning about the finance of open spaces (W.P. (44) 531). This matter had been discussed by the Reconstruction Committee on the 30th August. It had then been agreed that, subject to consultation with the Departments primarily concerned and the concurrence of the War Cabinet, an assurance would be given in the House of Commons that Parliamentary authority would be sought to provide Exchequer assistance, where it was shown that a local authority could not without financial hardship acquire land for open spaces up to an approved minimum standard owing to the cost of the land in relation to the resources of the financial authority.

The Minister's memorandum set out the statement which it was proposed should be made.

The following points were made in discussion:—

- (a) The 3rd sentence of the statement read as follows:
“The provision of adequate open space is, in their view, a local not a central function; the benefit accrues almost entirely to the local population and only very indirectly to the nation as a whole.” Several Ministers felt that this sentence was open to challenge and it was agreed to omit it.
- (b) The statement should refer to “. . . cases in built-up areas where it can be shown to the satisfaction of *His Majesty's Government* that a local planning authority could not, without undue financial hardship, conform to the requisite standard . . .”
- (c) A sentence on the following lines should be inserted:
“Grants from the Minister of Education will also be available under the provisions of Section 3 of the Physical Training and Recreation Act, 1937, as amended by Section 53 (4) of the Education Act, 1944.”

The War Cabinet—

Approved the draft statement subject to these and minor drafting amendments.

**Housing
London
Housing
Situation.**

4. The War Cabinet had before them a joint memorandum by the Minister of Reconstruction and the Minister of Labour and National Service (W.P. (44) 532) suggesting measures to improve the serious housing position in London due to flying bomb attacks.

Restrictions on the taking of Service leave in London.

The Minister of Reconstruction proposed that London should be placed out of bounds for troops on leave, other than those whose homes were in the area.

The Secretary of State for War said that this was the rule for British troops, but that it was becoming increasingly difficult to enforce it as the danger from flying bombs and rockets decreased and in view of the fact that it did not apply to the United States and Dominions Forces.

The Secretary of State for Air said that Dominions Forces must be treated in the same way as United States Forces.

The Parliamentary Secretary, Admiralty, said that the Admiralty were willing to accept the proposed restriction, provided an exemption were granted to personnel on 48 hours leave from Portsmouth and Chatham. It was pointed out, however, that such an exemption would detract greatly from the value of the proposed restriction.

" X "

The general feeling of the War Cabinet was that, in view of the serious housing position in London, the proposed restriction should be imposed but that in the first instance an attempt should be made to secure the agreement of the United States authorities to the placing of London out of bounds or to some limitation of the numbers of United States troops allowed to take leave in London.

The War Cabinet—

- (1) Invited the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs to approach the United States Ambassador on the lines indicated at " X " above.

Surrender of Requisitioned Property.

The Minister of Reconstruction proposed that the Service Departments should surrender any requisitioned property in the London area which was not in use and should consider sympathetically applications for property still in use.

The Secretary of State for War stressed the importance of having hostel accommodation in London in order to provide for troops now overseas who would be released from service or who would be given leave in the near future. Although these troops were so far as possible routed away from London, it was inevitable that considerable numbers should pass through London, and there would be serious criticism if accommodation for them was not available.

The Minister of Health asked whether further steps could not be taken to release small dwelling-houses requisitioned in the London area by the Service Departments.

The War Cabinet—

- (2) Invited the Service Ministers to make every effort to release requisitioned property in their possession in the London area.

Staffing of Hostels.

The Minister of Reconstruction said that it would be of great assistance if the Service Departments would make available women from the Women's Services to act as cooks and to undertake domestic duties in hostels for building operatives.

The Secretary of State for War and the *Parliamentary Secretary, Admiralty*, said that the War Office were already short of their requirements of women with the necessary qualifications. Moreover, if any staff were to be supplied, it would have to be on the understanding that the conditions of work were satisfactory.

The War Cabinet—

- (3) Invited the Minister of Labour and National Service, in consultation with the Service Ministers, to consider what assistance in the staffing of hostels could be provided by the Service Departments.

Use of Italian Prisoners of War.

The Minister of Reconstruction proposed that the Inter-Departmental Committee on the Allocation of Prisoners of War should examine the possibility of releasing, for emergency housing work in London, Italian prisoners of war who had experience of erecting huts.

The Secretary of State for War said that, while he was not opposed to the suggestion, he was very anxious that the two Construction Companies which had been lent for work in London should be returned to the Army, since they were urgently required for operations abroad.

The War Cabinet—

- (4) Agreed that the Inter-Departmental Committee on the Allocation of Prisoners of War should examine the

possibility of the release, for emergency housing work in London, of Italian prisoners of war now employed by the Service Departments

Civil Building by Government Departments.

The Minister of Reconstruction pointed out that it had been agreed that, for a period of six months, no licences should be granted for building work in the London area, except war damage repairs and the remedying of urgent sanitary and structural defects.

He asked the War Cabinet to give a ruling that the same principle should apply to work carried out or sponsored by Government Departments, which was not subject to licensing.

The War Cabinet—

- (5) Agreed to the proposal made by the Minister of Reconstruction.

Decorations and Minor Repairs in Government Departments.

The Minister of Reconstruction invited the War Cabinet to agree that all work on decoration and minor repairs in Government Departments should be virtually suspended during the next six months. The War Cabinet's ruling would be applied by the Ministry of Works.

The War Cabinet—

- (6) Agreed to the course proposed by the Minister of Reconstruction.

Allocation of Houses.

The Secretary of State for War said that concern was being expressed among the Forces overseas about the allocation of houses, particularly in the London area. It was felt that persons now in this country would get priority and that no houses would be available for men when they were released from the Services. It was desirable that some reassurance should be given to the Forces.

The Minister of Reconstruction said that the British Legion had suggested that a statement should be issued to the effect that men who had been in the Forces would have first priority. It was, of course, impossible to give any promise of this kind.

The War Cabinet—

- (7) Invited the Minister of Health and the Secretary of State for Scotland to prepare a statement to meet the point raised by the Secretary of State for War.

**Closer Union
between
Southern and
Northern
Rhodesia and
Nyasaland.**

(Previous
Reference:
W.M.(44)90th
Conclusions,
Minute 3.)

5. The War Cabinet had before them a joint memorandum by the Secretaries of State for Dominion Affairs and for the Colonies (W.P. (44) 521). When this matter had last been considered by the War Cabinet they had decided that no announcement should be made about the setting up of a permanent Inter-Territorial Council, or about the related issue of amalgamation, until the results of Sir Godfrey Huggins's consultations with his colleagues, on his return to Southern Rhodesia, were known.

Attached to the joint memorandum was a letter from Sir Godfrey Huggins dated the 8th August, in which the idea of a standing Inter-Territorial Council was accepted, but somewhat grudgingly. It seemed as though pressure from Southern Rhodesia for amalgamation might be resumed again before long.

The Secretaries of State for Dominion Affairs and for the Colonies concluded that the best course would be that His Majesty's Government should make an announcement, as soon as possible after the Southern Rhodesia Legislative Assembly met in October, on the lines of Appendix B to W.P. (44) 521. It was proposed to

communicate the draft to the Southern Rhodesia Government in advance. Their concurrence would not be expressly asked for, but any comments which they made would, of course, be considered.

The War Cabinet—

Approved the course of action proposed in W.P. (44) 521.

Proposed
College of
Aeronautics.

6. *The Deputy Prime Minister* informed the War Cabinet that, at the meeting of the Lord President's Committee on the 22nd September, approval had been given in principle to the establishment of a College of Aeronautics on the lines proposed by an inter-Departmental committee. Subject to any alterations necessary on security grounds the report of the Inter-Departmental Committee would be published, and it was intended that an early start should be made with a scheme for a temporary college at Abingdon. The Deputy Prime Minister thought that the War Cabinet should be aware of this development.

The Secretary of State for Air said that he regretted that the Abingdon airfield would not be available: but the scheme could be initiated on the Aldermaston airfield, which the Inter-Departmental Committee had envisaged as suitable for the location of the permanent College.

Several Ministers expressed regret that an alteration should be found necessary in the scheme which had been submitted to, and approved by, the Lord President's Committee only three days earlier.

The War Cabinet—

- (1) Took note of the statement by the Deputy Prime Minister.
- (2) Invited the Minister of Aircraft Production to arrange for examination at an early date of the point raised by the Secretary of State for Air, as to the availability of the Abingdon airfield for the proposed College.

Italy.
(Previous
Reference:
W.M. (44) 125th
Conclusions,
Minute 4.)

7. *The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs* said that several further telegrams had been exchanged since this matter was considered by the War Cabinet on Friday. The President had been very anxious that the joint statement should be released for publication in the papers that morning, the 25th September, but had now agreed to postpone publication until the morning papers of Wednesday, the 27th September.

The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs thought that this course should be accepted. He added that the amendments which we had put forward in Cordite 393 had all been accepted. He also proposed to ask the President to make a further minor amendment in the text of the paragraph about the provision by U.N.R.R.A. of medical aid and other supplies for Italy.

The War Cabinet—

Approved the course proposed by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.

Travel
Facilities.
Visits by
Non-Official
Civilians to
France.

8. *The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs* said that the War Cabinet would be aware that some difficulty had arisen as to the grant of facilities for non-official civilians to visit France. It had been alleged in some quarters that more favour had been shown to United States than to British civilians.

The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs said that a temporary arrangement had now been made whereby S.H.A.E.F. undertook to grant facilities for such visits to non-official civilians whose names

were communicated to them by the War Cabinet Offices as having been vouched for by the appropriate authority. The War Cabinet Offices in this matter would act on behalf of the War Cabinet and on the recommendation of the Foreign Office.

The War Cabinet—

Took note with approval of this arrangement.

**Reallocation
of Industrial
Capacity.**

9. *The Minister of Production* said that Mr. Stokes, M.P., had put down a question to the President of the Board of Trade for answer on the following day, referring to an American decision to switch over 40 per cent. of total production to peace purposes on the conclusion of hostilities with Germany; and enquiring what corresponding action we proposed to take. He (the Minister of Production) had already prepared, for consideration by the War Cabinet, a statement on this subject which he suggested should be made in Parliament in the following week. He hoped that although this draft statement had not yet been circulated, the War Cabinet would agree that the President of the Board of Trade could answer Mr. Stokes's question on the following day by saying that the Minister of Production hoped to make a statement in Parliament at an early date.

The War Cabinet—

Approved this suggestion.

*Offices of the War Cabinet, S.W. 1,
25th September, 1944.*
