CONCLUSIONS of a Meeting of the War Cabinet held in the Prime Minister's Room, House of Commons, S.W. 1, on Thursday, 30th November, 1944, at 11:30 a.m.

Present:

The Right Hon. WINSTON S. CHURCHILL, M.P., Prime Minister (in the Chair).
The Right Hon. ERNEST BEVIN, M.P., Minister of Labour and National Service.
The Right Hon. HERBERT MORRISON, M.P., Secretary of State for the Home Department and Minister of Home Security.

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 (Items 1-4).
The Right Hon. THOMAS JOHNSTON, M.P., Secretary of State for Scotland.
The Right Hon. RICHARD LAW, M.P., Minister of State (Items 3-5).

Secretariat:

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

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1. *The Deputy Prime Minister*, on behalf of the War Cabinet, extended the warmest congratulations to the Prime Minister on the occasion of his 70th birthday.

*The Prime Minister* thanked his colleagues for their good wishes.

2. At their meeting on the 8th November the War Cabinet had agreed that the legislation for the resumption of local elections should provide for retirement by annual thirds in local councils where this had hitherto been the practice, on the understanding that in any ward where there was a co-opted member he should retire first.

The War Cabinet now had before them a joint Memorandum by the Home Secretary and Minister of Home Security and the Secretary of State for Scotland (W.P. (44) 672) asking the War Cabinet to reconsider this decision, and to agree that at the first local elections all the existing councillors should retire.

*The Home Secretary and Minister of Home Security* said that the War Cabinet’s decision would involve complicated and lengthy statutory provisions to settle the rotation for retirement, and would often give rise to the anomaly of an elected councillor’s having to retire while a co-opted councillor remained. Public opinion, as shown by the newspaper extract annexed to W.P. (44) 672, was strongly against the continuance of councillors longer than was necessary, and he was afraid that the Government would be attacked from all sides of the House on this matter. It should be borne in mind that the principle of the clean sweep applied both to Parliament and to county councils and local authorities in London.

*The Secretary of State for Scotland* said that 80 per cent. of the Convention of Royal Burghs, which represented all town councils in Scotland, were in favour of the clean sweep. Unfortunately, co-option had sometimes been worked unfairly. For example, where a vacancy had occurred in the place of an independent member, the majority in the council had too often filled the place by the appointment of a member of their own party. The result was that a good deal of bitterness had been created and there was a strong feeling in favour of getting rid of co-opted members as soon as possible.

*The Lord Privy Seal* urged that, if the decision previously reached gave rise to anomalies, it would be better simply to provide for the retirement of a third of the members of each council at the first election, without seeking to secure that co-opted members should retire first. This course was favoured by the Association of Municipal Corporations. The assimilation of the local government and Parliamentary franchises and the alteration with regard to the business premises vote meant a considerable change, and in these circumstances it was desirable to do everything possible to preserve continuity.

*The Secretary of State for Air* stressed the strength of the feeling in Scotland in favour of the proposals put forward by the Home Secretary and Minister of Home Security and the Secretary of State for Scotland.

In further discussion, *the Prime Minister* suggested that the principle of continuity would be adequately preserved if at the first election all the co-opted members were to retire, together with those members who had been elected in 1936 (or the Spring of 1937 in certain cases) and had been due to retire under the ordinary rotation in the Autumn of 1939 (or the Spring of 1940).
The War Cabinet—

Agreed that in the case of those local authorities where retirement by annual thirds had hitherto been the practice it should be provided (i) that at the first election all co-opted members should retire, together with all elected members who would have retired under the normal rotation in the Autumn of 1939 or the Spring of 1940; and (ii) that at subsequent elections retirement should be by annual thirds.

3. The War Cabinet had before them a Memorandum by the Home Secretary and Minister of Home Security (W.P. (44) 689) about applications by Members of Parliament to visit France.

The Home Secretary and Minister of Home Security recalled that at their meeting on the 2nd July, 1943 (W.M. (43) 92nd Conclusions, Minute 1) the War Cabinet had decided that the rule that permission should be granted for applications to visit neutral countries only where the visit would be of definite public advantage or the applicant had urgent and important business to transact should apply to Members of Parliament in the same way as to other persons; and that on the 29th August, 1944 (W.M. (44) 112th Conclusions, Minute 5), it had been agreed that the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs should state that in present circumstances it was not possible to arrange for private visits to France by Members of Parliament.

The only method of reaching France at present was by military aircraft, and there was no authority to charge a fare. There was likely to be a greatly increased demand from business men very soon, and there were large numbers of people who had a claim to be allowed to travel to France on compassionate grounds, as well as numbers of refugees who were anxious to return to their country. In the circumstances he saw great difficulty in agreeing to visits by Members of Parliament merely for the purpose of renewing personal and political contacts, though he would, of course, agree to a Member’s going if a case was made good on business grounds.

He had felt obliged to refuse permission to Mr. Ronald Tree, M.P., and Mr. Hamilton Kerr, M.P., who had been invited by His Majesty’s Ambassador at Paris to visit him, and these Members had given notice of intention to raise the matter in the House. Subject to the views of the War Cabinet, he felt that no special facilities should be granted to Members of Parliament to visit France until the transport situation was such that the present restriction on civilian travel should be relaxed and until they could go by public transport at their own expense. Alternatively, arrangements might be made for an all-party delegation to visit France.

He also hoped that, when a member of the public applied to a Department other than the Home Office to support his application for permission to visit France, care would be taken not to give to him any indication of the Department’s view on the application.

The Minister of State said that the view of the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs was that Members of Parliament who could arrange for accommodation in France should be permitted to go, and the Lord Privy Seal supported the view that permission should be granted to Mr. Ronald Tree, M.P., and Mr. Hamilton Kerr, M.P., to visit the Ambassador.

In further discussion, it was pointed out that it would be extremely difficult to justify allowing Members of Parliament to visit France merely for personal or political reasons at a time when travel to France by business men was severely rationed. Moreover, in present conditions visits by Members of Parliament on any large scale were unlikely to be welcome. It would be invidious to base the decision whether to grant a permit or not on whether the Member had been able to arrange for accommodation.
The War Cabinet—

Agreed that, for the present, the Home Secretary and Minister of Home Security should take the line that Members of Parliament as such should not be granted facilities to visit France until the present restrictions on civilian travel could be relaxed, and they could go by public transport at their own expense.

Indians in South Africa.

(Previous Reference: W.M. (44)152nd anti-Asiatic legislation in Natal.)

4. At their meeting on the 21st November the War Cabinet had approved draft telegrams to the Government of India and the United Kingdom High Commissioner for South Africa about the situation which had arisen between India and South Africa over the W.M. (44) 152nd anti-Asiatic legislation in Natal.

The War Cabinet now had before them a Memorandum from the Secretary of State for India (W.P. (44) 694) reporting that the Viceroy had asked that the telegram addressed to him should be recast so as to convey His Majesty’s Government’s decision regarding the proposed trade embargo with a more sympathetic introduction. This would ease his difficulties with his Council. He asked that the first three paragraphs as originally approved should be addressed to him in a private telegram, and gave an assurance that he would do his best to convey their substance to his Council.

A small amendment was also proposed in the text of paragraph 4 of the original telegram to make it clear that His Majesty’s Government might feel obliged to intervene to prevent prohibition of exports from India to South Africa as well as an embargo of South African imports into India.

After a short discussion, the War Cabinet—

Agreed to the despatch to the Viceroy of the revised telegram annexed as Appendix A to W.P. (44) 694, on the understanding that the first three paragraphs of the original draft would be sent to the Viceroy simultaneously as a private telegram.

Newfoundland.

(Previous Reference: W.M. (43)158th Newfoundland. It had been made clear throughout that this was a goodwill mission and not a formal mission of enquiry, and as such would not be asked to submit a report for publication.

Nevertheless, each of the Members on his return had presented the then Secretary of State (Mr. Attlee) with a report containing his impressions and recommendations. As much confidential information had been given to the members of the mission on the understanding that the visit was of an informal nature, and as no formal evidence had been taken, it had been clearly undesirable that these reports should be published, and the three Members had thus been informed. [See W.P. (43) 507.]

Some time ago Lord Ammon had asked the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs whether it would be in order for him to write a pamphlet about Newfoundland. He (the Secretary of State) had replied that, provided it was clear that there was no question of publishing the report, but of writing a pamphlet giving Lord Ammon’s personal views and opinions, it was not for him to raise objection. A pamphlet by Lord Ammon had now been published, entitled “Newfoundland—the Forgotten Island,” which consisted almost entirely of extracts from his report with little or no alteration.
Some of the material contained in the pamphlet was very unsuitable for publication. For example, it discussed the possibilities of Newfoundland being federated with Canada or the United States. The publication of such material at this juncture, when the future policy in regard to Newfoundland was being formulated, was very unfortunate.

The other two members of the informal mission—Sir D. Gunston and Mr. A. P. Herbert—had now put down questions referring to this publication and asking if it would be in order for them to publish their reports.

After a short discussion, the War Cabinet agreed as follows:

1. The Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs was asked to arrange for the circulation to the War Cabinet of copies of the reports by all three members of the mission.

2. It was hoped that the questions referred to by the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs could be postponed; failing this, a reply should be given to the effect that publication by Lord Ammon of a pamphlet which so closely resembled the report which he had submitted was contrary to the understanding reached with His Majesty's Government that these reports should not be published. As, however, Lord Ammon's pamphlet had been published, consideration was being given to the question whether the other two reports should also be published.

Reference might also be made to the informal nature of the mission and to the extent to which information had been obtained in confidence.

*Offices of the War Cabinet, S.W. 1,
30th November, 1944.*
The War Cabinet—

Agreed that, for the present, the Home Secretary and Minister of Home Security should take the line that Members of Parliament as such should not be granted facilities to visit France until the present restrictions on civilian travel could be relaxed, and they could go by public transport at their own expense.

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