W.M. (45)

30th Conclusions.

WAR CABINET 30 (45).

CONCLUSIONS of a Meeting of the War Cabinet held in the Cabinet War Room on Wednesday, 14th March, 1945, at 12 noon.

Present:

The Right Hon. Winston S. Churchill, M.P., Prime Minister (in the Chair).
The Right Hon. Oliver Lyttelton, M.P., Minister of Production.
The Right Hon. Lord Woolton, Minister of Reconstruction.
The Right Hon. Viscount Cranborne, Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs.
The Right Hon. Sir James Grigg, M.P., Secretary of State for War.
The Right Hon. Sir Stafford Cripps, K.C., M.P., Minister of Aircraft Production.
The Right Hon. Lord Leathers, Minister of War Transport.
The Right Hon. Brendan Bracken, M.P., Minister of Information.
The Right Hon. Lord Cherwell, Paymaster-General.

The following were also present:

The Right Hon. Lord Beaverbrook, Lord Privy Seal.
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The Right Hon. Sir Archibald Sinclair, Bt., M.P., Secretary of State for Air.
The Right Hon. R. S. Hudson, M.P., Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries.
Colonel the Right Hon. J. J. Llewellyn, M.P., Minister of Food.
The Right Hon. Richard Law, M.P., Minister of State.

Secretariat:

Mr. Norman Brook.
Sir Gilbert Laithwaite.

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1. The War Cabinet had before them—

(i) Memoranda by the Minister of Food (W.P. (45) 109, 130 and 158) on the prospective world shortage of food in 1945.

(ii) A Memorandum by the Minister of War Transport (W.P. (45) 145) on the proposed Anglo-American survey of the level of United Kingdom stocks of food and raw materials.

(iii) Telegrams* which had passed between President Roosevelt and the Prime Minister about the supply of food for liberated areas in North-West Europe.

(iv) A Memorandum by the Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries and the Minister of Food (W.P. (45) 36) on the post-war contribution of British agriculture to the saving of foreign exchange.

World Supply Situation.

The War Cabinet first discussed the prospective general shortage of food supplies.

The Minister of Food said that, for the reasons stated in his Memoranda, 1945 would be a critical year for food. Of the chief foods only wheat would be available in abundance; and the difficulties of the supply situation could be illustrated by the position in regard to meat. There was a prospective deficit of 1,800,000 tons between world requirements and supplies of meat. A few weeks ago he had hoped that this deficit could be bridged, in agreement with the United States authorities, by some reduction in standards of consumption in the United States and some reduction in United Kingdom stocks. The most recent information, however, suggested that the War Food Administration were unwilling to contemplate any further cuts in United States consumption, and had recommended to the Combined Food Board that during the second quarter of 1945 no meat whatever should be exported from the United States, either for the United Kingdom or for the liberated areas.

Points made in discussion were:

(a) The Prime Minister said that, in the circumstances disclosed by the Minister of Food, we should defer fulfilment of our recent offer to supply 25,000 tons of corned beef to Russia.

(b) Australia and New Zealand were supplying substantial quantities of meat to United States Forces in the Pacific. It was true that the meat supplies which we were now obtaining from the United States were about one-third more than those which they were drawing from the Southern Dominions; but this need not prevent us from making full use of the argument that, if the United States maintained their view that they could supply no meat to this country in the second quarter of the year, we could not continue to go without the meat supplies which they were now drawing from Australia and New Zealand.

(c) The United States authorities should be pressed to review their current rates of food consumption both for the Armed Forces and for the civil population. The supplies per head for United States troops were far in excess of British scales. It was estimated that the annual meat supplies for the United States Forces would provide 450 lbs. per head as compared with about 300 lbs. for British troops. In terms of calories per day the average figures for total civilian food consumption in the United States was 3,200 as compared with 3,000 for the civilian population in this country.

The Prime Minister, in summing up this part of the discussion, said that at this stage of the war the maintenance of minimum scales of food supply should, if need be, take priority over the needs of military operations. It was clear that we were facing a situation of grave shortage, which would be aggravated if the Americans

* Nos. 710 and 712 from President Roosevelt.
No. 392 from the Prime Minister.
failed to make their contribution by an early reduction in the level of	heir food consumption. There were indications that the State
Department and the Foreign Economic Administration were dis­
pensed to take a different view of this matter from the War Food
Administration in United States; and it was desirable that an
approach should now be made to the United States Government
at the highest level to impress on them the seriousness of the situation
and the need for early economies in their levels of food consumption.

Discussion then turned on the proposal, which had been put
forward at the Crimea Conference, for an Anglo-American enquiry
into the level of stocks of food and raw materials in the United
Kingdom.

The Minister of War Transport said that the position had
changed since his memorandum (W.P. (45) 145) was circulated to
the War Cabinet. The Americans now recognised that, so far as
food was concerned, the problem had become one of supply rather
than shipping; and within the last few days a committee had been
appointed in Washington to consider, at a high level, what
reductions could be made in current rates of food consumption and
to study the food supply situation as a whole. It would also deal
with the question of United Kingdom stocks. In these circumstances
the Americans were no longer proposing to send a representative
to this country to hold a preliminary investigation into United
Kingdom stock levels in consultation with the interested Depart­
ments of His Majesty’s Government.

The Prime Minister said that this change in the situation
would affect the arrangements which we should make for co­
operation in this enquiry. As it was now recognised that the
problem was mainly one of supply, not of shipping, he thought
it would be more appropriate that the matter should be handled
by the Minister of Production and the Minister of Food. The most
convenient course would be for these two Ministers, possibly
accompanied by the Paymaster-General, to pay an early visit to
Washington.

The War Cabinet then discussed the supply of food-stuffs for
liberated areas in North-Western Europe.

The Secretary of State for War said that deliveries of civil
affairs supplies to North-Western Europe were likely to fall behind
schedule. Supplies were already about three weeks late in reaching
United States ports for shipment. If shortages developed, they
would have to be met either by reducing the ration for these areas
or by further inroads into United Kingdom stocks. For June and
July a total of 772,000 tons had been allocated, as against total
requirements for that period of 1,245,000 tons; and there could
be no certainty that even the reduced allocation would be delivered
in accordance with schedule.

In discussion it was pointed out that the estimate of total
requirements included substantial provision for the supply of food­
stuffs to Germany; and the suggestion was made that this provision
might be reduced. On the other hand, it was emphasised that part
of these supplies for Germany were required for feeding Allied
nationals who had been transferred into Germany from occupied
territories.

There was general agreement that it would be impracticable
to meet from United Kingdom stocks any substantial part of the
deficit between requirements and supplies for liberated areas.
Stocks of food-stuffs in this country were nearing the point agreed
between ourselves and the Americans as the minimum level required
to maintain efficient distribution. Even if we were prepared to
accept the risk of reducing our stocks, say, 10 per cent. below that
level, the supplies thus obtained would make no appreciable
contribution towards the needs of the liberated areas. It must be
brought home to the United States Government that, unless there
were some reduction in the level of food consumption in the United States, the situation could be met only by reducing supplies for the United States Forces or for the liberated areas.

The War Cabinet were reminded that arrangements had been made for a debate to be held in the House of Commons early in the following week on the supply position in the liberated areas.

The Lord President of the Council said that, in replying to this debate, he could not give an assurance, as he had hoped to be able to do, that the prospects for supplies over the next few months were reasonably satisfactory if, as the Secretary of State for War had said, we believed that even in this early period supplies from the United States would, in fact, fall behind schedule. Further, it seemed desirable that a clear public warning should be given that serious shortages of food were likely to develop during the summer months. If, however, the Prime Minister was proposing to communicate with President Roosevelt about the food supply position as a whole, it might be inexpedient that a public statement of this kind should be made in the House of Commons until President Roosevelt had had a reasonable opportunity for considering the Prime Minister’s communication.

It was agreed that the Leader of the House of Commons should explore the possibility of deferring for a few days the forthcoming debate on supplies for liberated areas.

The conclusions of the War Cabinet were as follows:

(1) The Minister of Production and the Minister of Food should submit, in the light of the discussion, material on which the Prime Minister might base a telegram to President Roosevelt. This, while related to the specific question of meeting S.H.A.E.F.’s requirements for civil affairs supplies in liberated areas, would express the views of His Majesty’s Government on the general questions which had been dealt with in the War Cabinet’s discussion of the prospective world shortage of food.

(2) The Minister of Production and the Minister of Food should proceed to Washington at an early stage to discuss means of meeting the threatened shortage of food; and it should be arranged that these discussions would cover the enquiry into United Kingdom stock levels which had been suggested by the Americans at the Crimea Conference.

The Prime Minister would consider whether the Paymaster-General should be associated with these discussions in Washington. The Minister of War Transport could go out at a later stage if shipping questions arose.

(3) The Lord President of the Council should take the opportunity afforded by the forthcoming debate on supplies to liberated areas to make a statement in the House of Commons about the gravity of the food situation generally.

(4) The Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries was authorised to communicate the main facts of the situation to County War Agricultural Executive Committees; and also to stress the need for maintaining food production in this country in the appeal which he was proposing to make for volunteers to help in this year’s harvest.

(5) A decision regarding the suggested communication to Dominion Governments of the information contained in W.P. (45) 109 should be deferred until a reply had been received to the telegram which the Prime Minister proposed to send to President Roosevelt (conclusion (1) above).
2. The Prime Minister read out to the War Cabinet the draft of a telegram which he was proposing to send to President Roosevelt on the possibility of issuing a warning to the German people about the effects of continued resistance.

The object of this declaration was to make it clear to the German people that prolonged resistance would increase the risk of widespread famine in Germany after their final surrender. The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs had pointed out that such a declaration might increase the risk that the Germans would seek to conserve their existing supplies of food by reducing the rations of prisoners of war and other Allied nationals now in Germany. There was also some danger that such a declaration might appear to imply that, if the Germans surrendered at an early date, the United Nations would see to it that no serious food shortage developed in Germany. This last point might be met by amending the declaration so as to make it clear that Germany must in any event suffer a very grave food shortage, which would develop into famine conditions if resistance were prolonged.

The Prime Minister said that, in sending the draft declaration to President Roosevelt, he would make clear the disadvantages as well as the advantages of issuing such a declaration.

Offices of the War Cabinet, S.W. 1,
14th March, 1945.
THE PRIME MINISTER referred to the remarks made by Mr. R.R. Stokes, M.P. in the course of a speech on the previous day in the debate on the Army Estimates. Mr. Stokes had said that the Prime Minister and the Minister of Production had consistently "lied" to the House about the tank programme. Mr. Speaker, when his attention was called to the point of order involved, had said that he had not heard this remark, and had added (in the Prime Minister's view injudiciously) that he was not sorry when Mr. Stokes' speech had come to an end. This had given rise to some further protests by Mr. Aneurin Bevan, M.P.

The Prime Minister said that he was not prepared to let Mr. Stokes' remark pass without challenge; and he had asked the Chief Whip to enquire when it would be convenient that he should refer to the matter in the course of that day's proceedings in the House of Commons.

Later in the meeting a message was received from the Chief Whip to the effect that it would be convenient if the Prime Minister made his statement immediately after Questions that day.

The Prime Minister indicated that he would make a strong protest and invite Mr. Stokes' to withdraw his remarks. Other Ministers said that they would make a special point of being on the front bench at the time when the Prime Minister was proposing to make his statement.
THE PRIME MINISTER said that he had seen reports of a strike among members of the Women’s Land Army as a result of the decision that they must be excluded from the arrangements for the grant of war gratuities to members of the Civil Defence Services. Such action was not likely to enlist public sympathy for their claims.

The War Cabinet were informed that the numbers involved in this strike were very small.

The Prime Minister said that he would not exclude the possibility of making some concessions to the Women’s Land Army, once the public interest in gratuities for the Civil Defence Services had decreased. What he had in mind were such concessions as a special allowance of clothing coupons on discharge, and permission to retain articles of uniform.