WAR CABINET 21 (45).

CONCLUSIONS of a Meeting of the War Cabinet held in the Cabinet War Room on Monday, 19th February, 1945, at 5:30 p.m.

Present:

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

The Right Hon. Lord Woolton, Minister of Reconstruction.

The following were also present:

The Right Hon. Viscount Cranborne, Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs.
Colonel The Right Hon. Oliver Stanley, M.P., Secretary of State for the Colonies.
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. H. U. Willink, K.C., M.P., Minister of Health (Items 4-6).
The Right Hon. Lord Leathers, Minister of War Transport (Item 4).
The Right Hon. the Earl of Selborne, Minister of Economic Warfare (Items 2-4).
The Right Hon. Lord Cherwell, Paymaster-General.

Marshall of the Royal Air Force
Sir Charles F. A. Portal, Chief of the Air Staff.

Vice-Admiral Sir E. Neville Syeret,
Vice-Chief of Naval Staff.

Secretariat.
Sir Gilbert Laithwaite.
Major-General L. C. Hollis.
Mr. W. L. Gorell Barnes.
## WAR CABINET 21 (45).

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The Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries said that, subject to the views of the War Cabinet, he would propose to reply as follows to a Parliamentary Question in regard to Lady Denman’s resignation as Honorary Director of the Women’s Land Army in England and Wales, which Mr. J. Henderson-Stewart, M.P., had put down for Tuesday, the 20th February:

“Lady Denman’s resignation, which I very greatly regret, was based on the fact that members of the W.L.A. have not been included in the schemes, in particular the Business Grants scheme, which have been announced for financial assistance to members of the Women’s Auxiliary Services and Civil Defence Services.

As indicated in the statement made on the 14th February, the Government consider that while members of the W.L.A. have rendered national service of the highest value and often at great personal sacrifice, the differences in conditions of recruitment and service that exist between the W.L.A. and the other Services preclude treatment on a uniform basis. The case of the W.L.A. has been under separate and, I can assure hon. members, sympathetic consideration, and I hope to be able to make an early announcement on the matter.”

At the suggestion of the Chancellor of the Exchequer it was agreed that the last three words of the penultimate sentence of this draft reply should be amended to read “the same basis.”

Subject to this amendment, the War Cabinet—

Approved the draft reply proposed by the Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries.

2. At their meeting on Wednesday, the 31st January, the War Cabinet had felt that, in order to bring pressure to bear on the Swedes, we should delay as long as possible the signature of the proposed War Trade Agreement with Sweden.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer now informed the War Cabinet that the Swedes were proving even more uncompromising than had been expected. Although they had agreed in principle to conclude a Payments Agreement before the end of 1944, they had first asked that the signature, due on the 31st December, 1944, should be postponed to the 15th February, 1945, and had now requested a further postponement. While much depended on a good agreement with Sweden at this stage, he felt no doubt that the Swedes regarded the moment as a crucial one from their point of view, and were anxious to make the most favourable bargain possible. But, while we could not carry on without considerable supplies from Sweden, equally we could not pay gold for them; that would, however, be the effect of the continuance of the existing temporary payments agreement. If the Swedes were really as friendly towards us as they suggested, now was the time for them to show it. His own view, with which the Foreign Office and the Minister of Economic Warfare agreed, was that we must stand quite firm on our points, and must refuse to sign the War Trade Agreement until a satisfactory settlement had been reached over the matter of payments. He realised that the United States were parties to the War Trade Agreement and might try to bring pressure upon us, but he trusted that they would, in fact, realise our difficulties.

The War Cabinet—

Approved the course of action proposed by the Chancellor of the Exchequer at “X.”
Policy towards Siam.
(Previous Reference:
W.M. (44) 127th Conclusions, Minute 6.)

3. The War Cabinet had before them a memorandum by the Deputy Prime Minister (W.P. (45) 109) regarding policy towards Siam. The discussion on this matter and the conclusions reached are recorded in the Secretary's Standard File of War Cabinet Conclusions.

The Channel Islands.
Evacuation of Sick Civilians.
(Previous Reference:
W.M. (45) 13th Conclusions, Minute 6.)

4. The War Cabinet had before them a memorandum by the Home Secretary and Minister of Home Security and the Minister of State (W.P. (45) 100) in which it was reported that the German Government had proposed that 1,000 seriously-ill civilians should be evacuated from the Channel Islands to the United Kingdom. The German Government had also expressed a desire that 200 wounded German soldiers should be evacuated at the same time as the civilians, but did not appear to have made this a condition of the evacuation of the civilians.

The Home Secretary and Minister of Home Security said that he was advised that the hospital and curative facilities available in the Channel Islands were very limited. He hoped, therefore, that the War Cabinet would agree that arrangements should be made on the lines proposed in paragraph 2 of W.P. (45) 100 to evacuate any civilians who were so seriously ill that removal was imperative for reasons of health. The International Red Cross Committee had asked the German Government for further details in regard to the proposal for the simultaneous evacuation of 200 wounded German soldiers; and this proposal would require further consideration when it was known more clearly what the Germans had in mind.

The Minister of War Transport said that he understood that two suitable Swedish ships, each with accommodation for 100 lying and 200 sitting cases, could be made available. It would not, therefore, be necessary to use one of the ships specially built for the Channel Islands' traffic, which were at present allocated to S.H.A.E.F. It was, however, important that the ships should come direct to this country, and we should therefore resist any proposal that the evacuated civilians should be taken to a neutral port for transhipment.

The War Cabinet agreed that arrangements should be made for the evacuation from the Channel Islands of civilians so seriously ill that removal was imperative for reasons of health. Should it eventually prove necessary to agree to the simultaneous evacuation of the 200 wounded German soldiers, it would be for consideration whether we should not insist that a corresponding number of British sick or wounded prisoners of war should be transferred to a neutral country in exchange.

The War Cabinet—

1. Subject to the alterations proposed by the Minister of War Transport as regards shipping arrangements, approved the proposals contained in W.P. (45) 100 for the evacuation of sick civilians from the Channel Islands.

2. Deferred consideration of the proposal for the simultaneous evacuation of 200 wounded German soldiers pending receipt of further information regarding the details of this proposal.

Allied Prisoners of War.
(Previous Reference:
W.M. (45) 18th Conclusions, Minute 4.)

5. The Deputy Prime Minister said there was increasing evidence of public anxiety regarding British prisoners of war in Germany.

The Secretary of State for War said that the Soviet Government had not yet issued visas, for which application had been made on the 26th January, for the liaison officers whom the War Office wished to appoint to deal with the Russian authorities on matters affecting British prisoners of war liberated by the Soviet Forces.
He had no information regarding the numbers of British prisoners of war so liberated. Unless the arrangements for implementing the agreement concluded at the Crimea Conference could be expedited, it might not be possible to take advantage of the opportunity for the repatriation of British prisoners which would be offered by the arrival at Odessa of a number of ships which were at present on their way to that port with 7,000 Russians who were being repatriated. He understood that the Foreign Office had sent a telegram to His Majesty's Ambassador at Moscow on the 16th February asking him to take these matters up with the Soviet Government.

Points in discussion were:

(a) Further opportunities for the repatriation of British prisoners of war would occur in the near future, as there were a large number of Russians who still remained to be repatriated.

(b) The War Cabinet were informed that General Eisenhower had recently suggested that, to obviate the great hardship to Allied prisoners of war involved in moving them from Eastern Germany in present conditions, the United States and United Kingdom Governments should propose to the German Government, through the Protecting Power that, where the evacuation of United States and United Kingdom prisoners of war involved greater hazard than the danger involved by leaving them where they were, they should, subject to suitable conditions, be released on the withdrawal of the German Forces. This proposal, together with another proposal put forward by the International Red Cross Committee that a number of lorries should be made available to that Committee for the purpose of carrying supplies to Allied prisoners, was under consideration by the Chiefs of Staff.

(c) Reference was made to a report that the German Government were moving British prisoners of war of prominent social position to Southern Germany, possibly with the ultimate intention of using them as hostages.

The War Cabinet—

Took note of the points made in the above discussion.

6. The War Cabinet considered a memorandum by the Home Secretary (W.P. (45) 101) on the question whether Miss Myra Curtis, formerly Director of Women's Establishment at the Treasury and now Principal of Newnham College, Cambridge, should be appointed as Chairman of the Committee on the Treatment of Children Deprived of a Normal Home Life which was being set up by the Home Secretary, the Minister of Health and the Minister of Education.

The Home Secretary said that he was satisfied that Miss Curtis had the ability and the experience which would enable her to carry out successfully the duties of Chairman of the proposed Committee. She was, however, one of the two persons who had recently presented the report on the London Remand Home question which was the subject of considerable controversy; and she had herself raised the question whether, in these circumstances, it might not be better if someone else were appointed as Chairman. His own feeling was that it would not be advisable for his colleagues and himself to give the impression that they were influenced by the criticisms which had been directed against the report on the London Remand Home question—criticisms which, in his view, were unjustified.

The Minister of Health said that, whilst he had not wished to press his views, he had never been satisfied that Miss Curtis would be an altogether suitable Chairman for the Committee. It was now clear, in view of the controversy which had arisen over the report on the London Remand Home question, that her appointment would not be well received. He himself would therefore be disposed to favour some other appointment.
The Minister of Education said that, whilst he had no doubt Miss Curtis had the ability and experience necessary for the appointment, he too felt that in the present circumstances some other appointment might be advisable.

After discussion, the general view of the War Cabinet was, however, that having regard to Miss Curtis's record and qualifications, and to the danger that a decision to look elsewhere for a Chairman might be interpreted as implying that the Government were impressed with the criticisms which had been directed against her, as joint author of the report on the London Remand Home question, her selection should stand.

The War Cabinet accordingly—

Agreed that Miss Curtis should be appointed as Chairman of the Committee on the Treatment of Children Deprived of a Normal Home Life.

Offices of the War Cabinet, S.W. 1,
19th February, 1945.