36th Conclusions.

WAR CABINET 36 (45).

CONCLUSIONS of a Meeting of the War Cabinet held in the Cabinet War Room on Monday, 26th March, 1945, at 5.30 p.m.

Present:

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

The Right Hon. Ernest Bevin, M.P., Minister of Labour and National Service.


The Right Hon. Lord Woolton, Minister of Reconstruction.

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.


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

The Right Hon. Brendan Bracken, M.P., Minister of Information.

The Hon. Sir Alexander Cadogan, Permanent Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.

Vice-Admiral Sir E. Neville Syfret, Vice-Chief of Naval Staff (Items 1 and 2).

The Right Hon. Lord Beaverbrook, Lord Privy Seal.

Colonel the Right Hon. Oliver Stanley, M.P., Secretary of State for the Colonies (Item 3).

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 Cherwell, Paymaster-General.

Marshal of the Royal Air Force Sir Charles F. A. Portal, Chief of the Air Staff (Items 1 and 2).

Lieut.-General Sir Archibald Nye, Vice-Chief of the Imperial General Staff (Items 1 and 2).

Secretariat:

Sir Edward Bridges.

General Sir Hastings L. Ismay.

Mr. Norman Brook.

Mr. W. S. Murrie.

Mr. L. F. Burgess.
## WAR CABINET 36 (49).

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Naval, Military and Air Operations.

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

On the Western front, air operations had been on a larger scale than in any previous week during the war. They had surpassed the figures for the week of the Normandy landings by 15 per cent. in sorties and 33 per cent. in tonnage of bombs dropped. During the period, a total of 69,000 sorties had been flown and 58,000 tons of bombs dropped.

In preparation for the crossing of the Rhine by 21st Army Group, the main objectives of the Allied Air Force had been (i) disruption of enemy communications, (ii) attacks on enemy fighters and airfields, (iii) bombing of troop concentrations, (iv) anti-tank patrols, (v) operations behind the enemy lines, and (vi) the airborne operation itself. In addition, a number of oil targets had been attacked.

Total Allied losses had been 447 aircraft as against 545 lost by the enemy.

Bomber Command had carried out 5,900 sorties and dropped 19,000 tons of bombs. Their main targets had been the oil plants of Bothen, Hamburg, Dortmund, and Bremen. In addition, five out of the seven important bridges and viaducts attacked were known to have been destroyed.

Mosquitoes had bombed Berlin each night.

United States bombers had flown 9,600 sorties and dropped 19,000 tons of bombs. Their main targets had been enemy airfields; but 2,800 tons of bombs had also been dropped on Berlin.

The Tactical Air Force had flown 50,000 sorties and dropped 19,000 tons of bombs.

In the British and American airborne operations on the 24th March some 1,300 gliders had been employed and 52 aircraft had been lost during the operation. The opposition met by the British Airborne Division had been heavier than that met by the American Division, and casualties had been fairly heavy.

Mediterranean.

In the Mediterranean 10,700 sorties had been flown and 13,200 tons of bombs dropped for the loss of 99 aircraft. Considerable damage had been caused to rail communications in Austria, South Germany and Hungary. Attacks on enemy communications in the Po Valley and the Brenner Pass had been continued.

Super Fortresses had made successful attacks on Kobi and Nagoya, dropping some 2,700 tons of bombs, mostly incendiaries.

Naval Operations.

The confirmed shipping losses for the week, due to enemy action, had been 43,988 tons. The confirmed shipping losses for March now amounted to 77,369 tons.

Two U-boats had been sunk during the week, bringing the U-boat sinkings in March to 4 sunk and 4 probably sunk.

A convoy of 22 ships had arrived in North Russia. Two ships and one escort had been torpedoed in the approaches to Kola Inlet.

On the 22nd March our light forces had successfully beaten off an attack by U-boats on a convoy off the East Coast.

Five midget U-boats had been sunk or probably sunk during the week.

United States carrier-borne aircraft had attacked the islands of Kyushu and Shikoku in Japan on the 16th March. A number of Japanese warships were claimed as damaged. United States losses in aircraft had been light, but several ships had been damaged by air attack.

The War Cabinet were given the latest information about the operation of 21st Army Group in crossing the Rhine on the 23rd/24th March. Footholds across the river had been quickly gained by both British and United States forces, and good initial progress had been made except in the Rees area, where there had been stiff fighting. In general, the British forces had met with more opposition than the Americans. Field-Marshal Montgomery expected stiff resistance in the early stages, and there was likely to be some heavy fighting before any substantial advance was made from the east bank of the river. So far 10,500 prisoners had been captured and large numbers of the enemy had been killed.
The United States 3rd Army continued to make striking pro­
gress and American troops were reported to have entered Darmstadt and Frankfurt. All enemy resistance west of the Rhine had now ceased; and of 250,000 enemy troops estimated to have been in that area about 150,000 had been either captured or killed.

In the Arakan area troops had landed north of Taungup. The capture of Mandalay had been completed on the 20th March, and our troops to the south had joined forces with those advancing from the west at Kyaukse. Myingyan had been captured.

Russian forces had now reached the coast between Danzig and Gdynia. At Stettin the last German bridgehead east of the Oder had been eliminated. To the south the Russians were attacking in the area of Kustrin. In Upper Silesia, in the neighbourhood of Oppeln, the Russians had advanced and claimed 30,000 Germans killed and 30,000 prisoners. West of Budapest and north of Lake Balaton Marshal Tolbukhin and General Malinovsky had made a considerable advance.

The War Cabinet—
Took note of these statements.

Attacks by Rockets and Flying Bombs.
(Previous Reference:
W.M.(45)32nd Conclusions, Minute 2.)

2. The Home Secretary and Minister of Home Security informed the War Cabinet that during the previous week there had been 51 incidents due to long-range rockets. Of these, 20 had occurred in London, 22 in Essex, 2 in Kent, one each in Bedfordshire, Berkshire and Hertfordshire, and 4 in the sea. Casualties had been 70 killed, 277 seriously injured, 570 slightly injured and 11 unclassified.

Of 49 flying bombs launched during the period, 20 had crossed the coast, but only two had reached London. 23 had been destroyed, 16 over the sea and 7 over land. Casualties had been 33 seriously injured and 68 slightly injured.

On the night of the 20th/21st March, some 20 enemy aircraft had carried out an intruder operation mainly over Norfolk. Several attacks had been made on civilian objectives, but there had been no casualties and little damage.

The War Cabinet—
Took note of these statements.

3. The War Cabinet had before them a Memorandum by the Secretary of State for the Colonies (W.P.(45)187) regarding a proposal, made by Sir Walter Citrine and the President of the Northern Rhodesia Mineworkers’ Union, that Mr. Maybank should now be allowed to return to Northern Rhodesia, having recently been reappointed as General Secretary of the Union.

Mr. Maybank had been deported from Northern Rhodesia in 1942 on the ground of his subversive activities directed against the war effort; and when in 1943 the Governor’s action in deporting Mr. Maybank had been called in question by the General Council of the Trades Union Congress, the War Cabinet had agreed that Sir Walter Citrine should be informed that there was no ground for reconsidering the decision taken. So long as the war with Germany continued, it was imperative that the production of copper in Northern Rhodesia should be maintained, and there was good reason for adhering to the decision taken in 1943. When the war with Germany ended, however, there would be less ground for opposing Mr. Maybank’s return; and it was probable that the Defence Regulation under which he was deported and was prevented from returning would be revoked. It was therefore proposed (in paragraph 4 of W.P.(45)187) that Sir Walter Citrine should be informed that the Secretary of State for the Colonies was not prepared to ask the Governor to allow Mr. Maybank to return to Northern Rhodesia at the present time, but that no objection would be raised to his return after the end of the war with Germany.
In discussion some doubt was expressed whether it was necessary to go so far at present as to indicate that no objection would be raised to Mr. Maybank’s return after the end of the war with Germany. It was pointed out, however, that there was certain to be agitation for Mr. Maybank’s return as soon as the war with Germany was over; and, as he would then be allowed to return, it was preferable to say so now and thus avoid appearing to have given way to pressure.

The War Cabinet—

Authorised the Secretary of State for the Colonies to reply to the representations made by Sir Walter Citrine on the lines suggested in paragraph 4 of W.P. (45) 187.

The War Cabinet had before them a Joint Memorandum by the Home Secretary and the Secretary of State for Scotland (W.P. (45) 185) regarding the provision of staff for registration officers and returning officers.

The Home Secretary recalled that the War Cabinet had already approved arrangements for the early release from the Forces, the Civil Defence Services and industry of staff required by the political Parties in connection with the General Election. If the election was to be conducted efficiently, it was equally necessary to release staff for electoral registration officers and returning officers, and urgent representations had been received on this matter from the County Councils Association, the Society of Clerks of the Peace and the Society of Town Clerks. The total number of key men required would certainly not exceed 2,000 and might well be considerably less. It was proposed that the Home Office and the Scottish Office should invite registration and returning officers to submit applications for the release of key men and, after examining the applications, should forward to the Ministry of Labour and National Service those which they felt able to support. In the case of persons in the Forces, the Ministry of Labour and National Service would invite the Service Departments to arrange for immediate release subject only to overriding military considerations. In the case of persons in industry, the Ministry of Labour and National Service would arrange for release in the absence of exceptional considerations.

In addition to the release of key men, it would be necessary to reinforce the existing clerical staffs of registration and returning officers, and it was suggested that the Ministry of Labour and National Service should be authorised to make all necessary arrangements to ensure that extra clerical assistance was forthcoming when required.

Discussion centred on the proposed release of men from the Forces. It was pointed out that there would be serious difficulty in releasing persons serving overseas. Although the numbers involved were relatively small, this proposal could not be considered in isolation from the other demands which were being made for the release of men from the Forces for various civil purposes. There was a real danger that these special releases would cause serious discontent in the Forces unless they were kept within very narrow limits. It was therefore urged that, in the first instance, releases from the Forces for this purpose should be confined to persons stationed in this country.

The Home Secretary said that, while he appreciated the difficulty of releasing men serving overseas, he could not take responsibility for ensuring that there was no breakdown in the arrangements for the General Election unless registration officers and returning officers had the experienced staff required; and he was advised that these would not be forthcoming in sufficient numbers if releases from the Forces were confined to men stationed in this country.
Further points in discussion were:

(a) The Secretary of State for Air pointed out that the man-power allocations for 1945 provided no fresh intake for the Royal Air Force; and, if men were to be withdrawn from the Royal Air Force under this scheme, he must ask for a corresponding replacement. The Minister of Labour and National Service said that he had no reserve of man-power from which such replacements could be found.

(b) It was suggested that a certain number of people with the necessary experience might be obtained by the release of persons at present employed in Government Departments, and the possibility of releasing such persons should also be considered.

The War Cabinet—

(1) Agreed that the procedure proposed in paragraph 3 of W.P. (45) 185 should be applied forthwith for the purpose of securing the temporary release of persons serving in the Armed Forces in this country, on the understanding that the Service Departments would not, save in exceptional cases, object to such releases on the ground of overriding military considerations.

(2) Approved the proposal made in paragraph 3 (b) of W.P. (45) 185 for the release of persons in industry, and invited the Home Secretary and the Secretary of State for Scotland to consider, in consultation with the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether additional persons with the necessary experience could not also be found among the existing staffs of Government Departments.

(3) Agreed that if, when it was possible to estimate the numbers likely to be secured by releases under conclusions (1) and (2) above, it appeared that the shortage of experienced staffs was such as to involve a risk of a breakdown in the arrangements for the General Election, the matter should again be brought before the War Cabinet.

5. The War Cabinet were informed that the Prime Minister proposed, subject to their views, to invite President Roosevelt to join him in sending a personal message to Marshal Stalin about the course of the discussions at Moscow on the reorganisation of the Polish Government. Copies of a draft telegram to the President were handed round at the meeting.

There was general agreement that it would be expedient, at this stage of the discussions, that President Roosevelt and the Prime Minister should send a joint message to Marshal Stalin; and that this suggestion should be put to the President on the lines indicated in the draft telegram. It was, however, suggested that the Prime Minister might wish to consider whether it would be preferable that the suggestion should be put to President Roosevelt through His Majesty's Ambassador at Washington, who could explain, at greater length than was possible in a telegram, the reasons why we favoured this course. Alternatively, the draft telegram could be divided, the substance of the proposed message to Marshal Stalin being incorporated in a subsequent telegram.

It was agreed that these suggestions on procedure should be submitted to the Prime Minister for his consideration later that evening.

Offices of the War Cabinet, S.W. 1,
26th March, 1945.