CONCLUSIONS of a Meeting of the War Cabinet held in the Cabinet War Room, on Monday, 22nd January, 1945, at 5.30 p.m.

Present:

The Right Hon. WINSTON S. CHURCHILL, M.P., Prime Minister (in the Chair).
The Right Hon. Sir JOHN ANDERSON, M.P., Chancellor of the Exchequer.
The Right Hon. OLIVER LYTTELTON, M.P., Minister of Production.

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 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. DUNCAN SANDYS, M.P., Minister of Works (Item 9).
The Right Hon. LORD CHERWELL, Paymaster-General.
The Right Hon. JAMES STUART, M.P., Joint Parliamentary Secretary, Treasury (Items 9 and 10).
The Hon. Sir ALEXANDER CADOGAN, Permanent Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs (Items 1-7).
Marshal of the Royal Air Force Sir CHARLES F. A. Portal, Chief of the Air Staff (Items 1-7).

The Right Hon. Anthony Eden, M.P., Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.
The Right Hon. ERNEST BEVIN, M.P., Minister of Labour and National Service.
The Right Hon. LORD WOOLTON, Minister of Reconstruction.
The Right Hon. SIR ARCHIBALD SINCLAIR, Bt., M.P., Secretary of State for Air.
The Right Hon. LORD LEATHERS, Minister of War Transport (Items 6 and 7).
The Right Hon. BRENDAN BRACKEN, M.P., Minister of Information.
The Earl of Munster, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Home Office (Item 8).
The Right Hon. W. WHITELEY, M.P., Joint Parliamentary Secretary, Treasury (Items 9 and 10).
Admiral of the Fleet Sir ANDREW CUNNINGHAM, First Sea Lord and Chief of Naval Staff (Items 1-7).
Field-Marshal Sir ALAN BROOKE, Chief of the Imperial General Staff (Items 1-7).

Secretariat:

Sir EDWARD BRIDGES.
General Sir HASTINGS L. ISMAY.
Sir GILBERT LAITTHWAITE.
Mr. W. S. MURRIE.
Mr. L. F. BURCHES.
## WAR CABINET 7 (45).

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The Chiefs of Staff reported the principal events of the previous week. Bomber Command had flown 1,714 sorties and dropped 4,756 tons of bombs, of which 4,000 had been on Germany. United States bombers had flown 3,700 sorties and dropped 8,000 tons of bombs, 6,000 tons of which had been on targets behind the battle front. The Allied Expeditionary Air Force had flown 9,400 sorties, attacking targets in the battle area. Eighty-seven A.F.Vs. and 1,800 other vehicles were claimed to have been destroyed. Seventy-seven enemy aircraft (including 45 on the ground) were claimed to have been destroyed as against 29 British and 35 American bombers, 8 bombers and 66 fighter-bombers of the Tactical Air Force and 12 Coastal Command aircraft.

Bad weather had again interfered with air operations. 6,300 sorties had been flown and 3,500 tons of bombs dropped. A record total of 7,400 sorties had been flown for the loss of 7 Allied aircraft. The targets had included railway centres and airfields.

Super-Fortresses had dropped 1,000 tons of bombs on Formosa and 160 tons on the Japanese mainland.

The Prime Minister referred to the suggestion made by the United States Chiefs of Staff that war-weary bomber aircraft loaded with explosive should be used against Germany. He would wish to have an opportunity of consulting the Home Secretary and Minister of Home Security before any final decision was reached in this matter.

Shipping losses from enemy action for the week amounted to 24,271 tons. The total shipping losses from enemy action for January so far amounted to 62,035 tons. One U-boat had been sunk off Land’s End on the 21st January and one had probably been sunk by American destroyers north of the Azores on the 16th January.

The Norwegian Submarine Utiria claimed that while on patrol off the Norwegian coast she had left a merchant ship sinking on the 11th January and had obtained two torpedo hits on a U-boat on the 16th January.

Two French cruisers had carried out a successful bombardment of San Remo and Porto Maurizio harbours on the 15th January. An Italian cruiser, two destroyers and a gunboat had been released from the Balearic Islands and had arrived at Malta.

H.M. Submarine Porpoise was reported overdue from patrol in the Malacca Straits and must be presumed lost.

The assessed sinkings as a result of carrier strikes against Indo-China on the 11th and 12th January were: 4 escort vessels, 213 freighters, 11 transport and 13 cargo vessels. In addition, 1 light cruiser, 11 oiler and 7 cargo vessels were claimed to have been damaged.

On the Western front the British attack, which aimed at pinching out the German salient in the angle between the Roer and the Meuse, was making good progress. The German salient in the Ardennes had been still further reduced. In places there had been stiff fighting, but there were also signs of enemy withdrawal.

On the Arakan coast our forces had landed on Ramree Island. The Japanese had counter-attacked unsuccessfully at Myebon. Our advance towards Mandalay continued, and further to the north the Chinese had succeeded in capturing Nampkan and were now trying to clear Wanting.

Very good progress was being made by United States forces on the island of Luzon.

In the north the German defensive position in East Prussia had been pierced and Gumbinnen and Tilsit captured. East Prussia was also threatened by Russians from the south, where Tannenberg had been taken. The main Russian thrusts were directed towards Posen and Oppeln in Silesia.
At this stage it was impossible to say how far the Russian advance would continue before it lost its impetus. But as and when German territory was reached the difficulties of the advancing troops would increase. Then they would encounter stronger local defences, and would be hampered by the change of gauge on the railways.

The War Cabinet—
Took note of these statements.

2. The War Cabinet were informed that during the previous week there had been 48 incidents from long-range rockets: 19 in London, 19 in Essex, 5 in Hertfordshire, 4 in Kent and 1 in the sea off Great Yarmouth.

No flying-bomb incidents had been reported.
The casualties for the week had been 92 killed and 238 seriously injured.
The War Cabinet—
Took note of this statement.

3. The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs said that the Head of our Military Mission in Moscow had for some time past been anxious to visit the Eastern Front. He had now been told that a visit could be arranged to the sector of the front in which the troops organised by the Lublin Poles were fighting. The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs thought that, in view of the delicacy of our position in regard to Poland, the Head of our Military Mission should reply that he was not anxious to visit this sector, but would be glad if arrangements could be made for him to visit some other sector.

The War Cabinet—
Approved this suggestion.

4. A general discussion took place on the latest developments in the Greek and Yugoslav situations and on the Polish problem. A record of the discussion and of the conclusions reached is contained in the Secretary’s Standard File of War Cabinet Conclusions.

5. The War Cabinet had before them a Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs (W.P. (45) 16) on the frontiers of Czechoslovakia.

In connection with the surrender terms for Germany and Hungary, the Czechoslovak Government had asked that, pending the Peace Treaty, they should resume control over all the areas taken
from Czechoslovakia at the time of Munich by Germany, Hungary and Poland. The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs had accepted this proposal, subject to War Cabinet approval, but had also felt bound to make a reservation in respect of the position of Teschen. On further reflection, he now recommended that he should be authorised to include Teschen within the scope of the arrangements.

After a short discussion, the War Cabinet—

(1) Approved the proposals by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs as set out in W.P. (45) 18.
(2) Invited the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs to inform the Dominions of the action proposed.
(3) Invited the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs to postpone his communication to the Czechoslovak Government until the comments of the Dominion Governments had been received, on the understanding that this would not result in action being delayed beyond the end of the present week.

6. The War Cabinet had before them a Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and the Secretary of State for War (W.P. (45) 33) making certain proposals for the repatriation of able-bodied long-term prisoners of war from Germany.

The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs said that reports received by the Foreign Office and the War Office pointed to the increasingly harmful effects, both mental and physical, of their prolonged captivity on the large number of British Commonwealth personnel who had been prisoners of war since the 1st July, 1940. Consequent on recent discussions with the Swiss authorities, there seemed a possibility of bringing about an exchange of long-term prisoners, and the Foreign Office had now elaborated a proposal with the War Office foreshadowing the exchange of 3,000 Germans, mainly soldiers captured in the Middle East, who had been taken prisoner before the 1st July, 1943, against a similar number of British prisoners captured before the 1st July, 1940. The selection of those to be repatriated would be left to the Detaining Power. Our own Service authorities insisted on the exclusion of certain specialist categories, such as U-boat crews. While the Germans who would be repatriated had been prisoners of war for a far shorter time than the British personnel, he did not think that that objection should be regarded as decisive.

The Chief of the Imperial General Staff said that he strongly supported the proposed arrangement.

After further discussion, the War Cabinet—

Approved the proposals of the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and the Secretary of State for War in W.P. (45) 33; and agreed that the United States Government should be told of the proposal at once, and that the Soviet Government should be informed after the German reply had been received.

7. At their meeting a week earlier the War Cabinet had considered a proposal by the Secretary of State for Air (W.P. (45) 22) proposing the extension to R.A.F. personnel in South-East Asia, the Middle East and the Central Mediterranean of the short-leave scheme recently approved for the Army and the Indian Army. The War Cabinet had agreed that the Minister of War Transport should further review the matter in consultation with the Ministers concerned, and should consider what special arrangements could be made to meet the Royal Air Force proposal, particularly in regard to Air Command, South-East Asia, and any corresponding Royal Navy needs.
The War Cabinet were informed that the matter had been discussed between the Departments concerned and that agreement had been reached between them.

The Secretary of State for Air said that, while he gratefully accepted the agreement reached, this represented a severe curtailment of his original request, and that he reserved the right to raise the matter again at a later date.

The Minister of War Transport said that, in view of the difficulty in meeting shipping requirements, he ought also to stipulate that the arrangements made should be subject to review, should circumstances make this necessary.

The War Cabinet—

The Bishop of Chichester.

Proposed Visit to the United States.

8. The War Cabinet had before them a Memorandum by the Minister of Information (W.P. (45) 39) seeking their guidance as to the line to be taken on an application by the Bishop of Chichester to be allowed to proceed to the United States during the spring, to fulfil an invitation from the Federal Churches of America, with which the presiding Bishop of the American Episcopal Church was associated. The Bishop had also received a letter from the Archbishop of York approving his proposed journey.

In discussion, several Ministers thought that the Bishop, in the course of his visit, would be likely to give expression to his views as an opponent of the bombing of German cities and in favour of a 'soft' peace. (He had advocated a 'negotiated peace' in 1939-40.) Such action in the United States on the part of the Bishop might well give rise to embarrassment and misunderstanding.

After a short discussion, the War Cabinet—

Agreed that the Minister of Information should approach the Bishop and seek from him an undertaking that, if he went to the United States, he would confine himself to fulfilling the invitation from the Federal Council of Churches in America, and that he would not make any speeches at all on political subjects. If such an undertaking was given, the visit should be approved.

9. The War Cabinet had before them a Note by the Minister of Works (W.P. (45) 42) regarding the rebuilding of the House of Commons.

The Minister of Works pointed out that the report of the Select Committee would be debated on the 25th January. He proposed that the Select Committee should be reconstituted with the restricted terms of reference set out in paragraph 2 of W.P. (45) 42, in order to deal with any suggestions made in the course of the debate. They should be able to complete this task within a month to six weeks. Thereafter he would propose himself to approve any minor changes which might be found necessary during the course of the work, consulting the House only should the question of a major departure arise.

If the House approved the Select Committee's proposals in principle on the 25th January, the architect would be instructed forthwith to proceed with the drawings, and, as soon as second-stage repairs of bomb damage in London were completed, or nearly completed, the work of demolition would be started. Should the demolition be finished before the detailed drawings were ready, it was proposed to go ahead with the preparation of the foundations on the basis of a schedule of prices, without waiting for the
completion of the drawings. By the time the foundations were completed, the more essential drawings should be available and it would be possible to place a lump-sum contract for the superstructure. If conditions were favourable at the time, double shifts would be worked, and by this means it should be possible to complete the work some time during the first half of 1949. The Government should indicate in the debate their acceptance of the proposal made by the Select Committee that the allocation of Strangers' seats should be undertaken by a committee, possibly presided over by Mr. Speaker. This would include the allocation of an appropriate amount of accommodation for Members of the House of Lords.

In discussion, stress was laid on the importance of providing suitable accommodation for meetings of the House of Commons at the earliest possible date. It was pointed out that there would be more inconvenience in the use of the existing meeting-place in the House of Lords in conditions of party Government, when the number of divisions would be greatly increased. In view of the relatively small labour force needed during the first year, and of the fact that the type of labour required was different from the type employed on the repair of war-damaged houses, it seemed hardly necessary to delay a start because of any risk of public criticism if it were undertaken before the completion of war-damage repairs.

The Prime Minister said that he would speak in the debate on the 25th January.

The War Cabinet—

(1) Agreed that, if the Select Committee's proposals for the rebuilding of the House of Commons were generally approved in the debate on the 25th January, the Select Committee should be reconstituted with the terms of reference set out in paragraph 2 of W.P. (45) 42.

(2) Approved the proposals in W.P. (45) 42 for the execution of the work, on the understanding that all possible steps would be taken to secure its completion at the earliest possible date.

(3) Agreed that in the debate it should be intimated that the Government accepted the proposal that the allocation of Strangers' seats should be entrusted to a Committee, possibly presided over by Mr. Speaker.

(4) Took note that the Chief Whip would furnish the Prime Minister with notes for his speech in the debate on the 25th January.

10. At their meeting on the 13th December, 1944, the War Cabinet had invited the Joint Parliamentary Secretaries to the Treasury to take soundings among Members of the House in order to ascertain their views with regard to the appointment of a Select Committee on Parliamentary Procedure.

The War Cabinet were now informed that 75 to 85 per cent. of Conservative Members appeared to be against the appointment of a Select Committee for this purpose at this juncture. The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster had intimated that the Liberal National Members were of the same view, which was also shared by the Chief Liberal Whip. On the other hand, Labour Members were generally in favour of taking any steps which might lead to the speeding up of the Parliamentary machine, and for this reason would support the proposal for a Select Committee. It was clear, however, that the view of the majority of the House was that the matter should be left for consideration until after a general election.

It was pointed out in discussion that, although the amount of business was increasing, it had not yet proved sufficient to justify the setting up of Standing Committees. Until this step had been taken, it seemed premature to enquire into other methods of enabling the House to deal with a greater volume of business.
The War Cabinet—
Agreed that, for the present, no steps should be taken with a view to the appointment of a Select Committee to examine and report on the proposals of the Machinery of Government Committee, set out in the Annex to W.P. (44) 424, for modification of Parliamentary procedure.

Offices of the War Cabinet, S.W. 1,
22nd January, 1945.