CONCLUSIONS of a Meeting of the War Cabinet held at 10 Downing Street, S.W.1, on Thursday, February 15, 1940, at 11-30 A.M.

Present:

The Right Hon. Neville Chamberlain, M.P., Prime Minister (in the Chair).

The Right Hon. Viscount Halifax, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.

Admiral of the Fleet the Right Hon. Lord Chatfield, Minister for Co-ordination of Defence.

The Right Hon. Lord Hankey, Minister without Portfolio.

The following were also present:


The Right Hon. Ernest Brown, M.P., Minister of Labour and National Service (Item 3).

General Sir W. Edmund Ironside, Chief of the Imperial General Staff (Items 5-9).

The Right Hon. Malcolm MacDonald, M.P., Secretary of State for the Colonies (Items 1 and 2).

Sir Horace J. Wilson, Permanent Secretary to the Treasury.

Vice-Admiral T. S. V. Phillips, Deputy Chief of Naval Staff (Items 5 and 6).

Secretariat:

Sir Edward Bridges.

Mr. F. Hemming.

Mr. W. D. Wilkinson.

Wing Commander W. Elliot.

Mr. G. N. Flemming.
### CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Minute No.</th>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>West Indies: Report of Royal Commission</td>
<td>331</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Publication of recommendations.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Short-term relief programme.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Announcement of the Government's intention to act in the spirit of the recommendations.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>The Colonial Empire: Statement of Policy on Development and Welfare and on Colonial Research</td>
<td>332</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Development and welfare.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Research.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mandated territories.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Compulsory Military Service</td>
<td>334</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Liability of British subjects in France and French citizens in Great Britain</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>The Air Situation</td>
<td>335</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>The Naval Situation</td>
<td>335</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Search for German merchant vessels.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shipping losses.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>U-boat sunk.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>U-boat sunk on the 12th February.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>The Military Situation</td>
<td>336</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Western front.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Finland.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Assistance to Finland</td>
<td>336</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Supply of aircraft.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pilots.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Field guns and ammunition.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Railway difficulties.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Approach to France.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>338</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Economic relations.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>338</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Internal situation.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1. The War Cabinet had before them a Memorandum by the Secretary of State for the Colonies (W.P. (G.) (40) 45) covering a summary of the recommendations of the West India Royal Commission.

The Secretary of State for the Colonies recalled that on the occasion referred to in the margin the War Cabinet had decided to withhold approval to the publication of the Report; and had invited him to communicate this decision to Lord Moyne and to the Governors of the West Indian Colonies.

The members of the Commission had been disappointed at the War Cabinet's decision, and disagreed with it. Provided, however, that they were not associated with the decision, they were willing to help the Government, and had agreed to prepare a statement of their Recommendations which could be published on the Commission's own authority.

The Secretary of State proposed that the Command Paper should consist of this Summary, plus the names and terms of reference of the Commission, their itinerary, and a letter from himself to the Commission on the subject of the non-publication of the body of their Report. The case for publishing the Commission's recommendations was, he thought, overwhelming. If accompanied by an announcement of the remedial measures to be taken, it would go far to allay the suspicions to which the non-appearance of the body of the Report would inevitably give rise.

The Prime Minister said that he found nothing in the summary to which the War Cabinet need take exception. The summary would, he thought, be generally accepted as ample evidence of the comprehensive way in which the Commission had investigated the social, educational, economic, agricultural and other problems of the Islands. The Commissioners would certainly not be open to the reproach of timidity. They need not fear that their work would suffer in the public estimation by reason of the non-publication of the body of their Report. There was general agreement with this view.

The Secretary of State for the Colonies said that he had considered what explanation should be given for non-publication of the body of the Report. It seemed the best solution to give no reason at all in public. Privately, however, the press might be told that while we would not have objected to the Report if taken as a whole, the use by the enemy of selected extracts might have been damaging to us.

General agreement was expressed with this view.

The Colonial Secretary said that, as he envisaged the situation after the publication of these documents, the Government's critics would point to the fact that they contained no promise of any immediate relief to the West Indies. Something in the nature of a short-term policy was obviously needed. He had reached agreement with the Treasury (who had been very helpful in this matter) on a short-term plan by which a sum of £350,000 would be made immediately available for relief and unemployment works in the various West Indian Islands.

As regards the announcement of this short-term plan, he had considered the desirability of inserting a passage in the White Paper on Colonial Development, immediately after paragraph 1. But he thought that the short-term plan, if it found a place in the White Paper, might have the appearance of a panic measure, or a bribe. Accordingly, he proposed that, on the 20th February (the date on which the two Command Papers were published in London), the West Indian Governors should be authorised to announce separately, each in his own Colony, the allocation of a specific sum for short-term purposes.
Announcement of the Government's intention to act in the spirit of the Royal Commission's recommendations.


In discussion general agreement was expressed with the Colonial Secretary's short-term plan. It was felt, however, that a short passage should be introduced at the end of paragraph 1 to explain that a sum was being made immediately available, as a first instalment of the long-term policy.

Attention was drawn to paragraph 1 of the White Paper on Colonial Development, in which it was stated that while the Government cannot commit themselves now to accept particular proposals, they are anxious to act as early as possible in the spirit of the recommendations of the Royal Commission as a whole.

The Secretary of State for the Colonies thought it impossible without more time for examination to go further at the moment. This passage itself would be definitely reassuring to the West Indies, as it indicated that the Commission's development and welfare recommendations in respect of the West Indies, costing some £1,400,000 per annum, would find their place within the framework of the new comprehensive proposals for Colonial development.

The War Cabinet—

(i) Authorised the Secretary of State for the Colonies to arrange for the publication, as a White Paper on the 20th February, of the Recommendations of the West India Royal Commission, in the form annexed to his Memorandum W.P. (G.) (40) 45, together with suitable introductory matter.

(ii) Agreed that no reason should be given publicly for the non-publication of the remainder of the Report of the Royal Commission.

(iii) Invited the Secretary of State for the Colonies to add to paragraph 1 of the draft statement of policy on Colonial Development and Welfare and on Colonial Research (see Minute 2) a statement in general terms of the Government's intention to take early action to give some measure of immediate assistance to the West Indian Colonies.

The War Cabinet had before them a Memorandum by the Secretary of State for the Colonies, to which was attached a draft statement of policy on Colonial Development and Welfare and on Colonial Research (W.P. (G.) (40) 44).

The Secretary of State for the Colonies said that the recommendations of the West India Royal Commission included proposals for an expenditure of some £1,400,000 per annum from the Exchequer, in order to enable the West Indian Colonies to reach a reasonable standard of Government and social services. Conditions there were probably worse than in any other part of the Empire, partly because, with the exception of Trinidad, they had no mineral resources and practically no secondary industries and were thus entirely dependent upon agriculture; and partly because their population was relatively sophisticated and therefore expected social services of a fairly high order. But conditions were bad in some of the other Colonies also, and generally speaking, they had not sufficient financial resources to provide themselves with the services which were required by present day standards.

A survey in the Colonial Office of the needs of the Empire generally had led him to propose that the Exchequer should find up to £5 million per annum in order to enable the Colonies to bring their services up to a reasonable standard. (This figure included £1,400,000 for the West Indies.) If this were agreed, new legislation would be necessary. The existing Colonial Development Fund was limited to £1,000,000 per annum, and was also restricted in its...
He therefore proposed that the existing Colonial Development Fund should be abolished and that provision should be made for a new vote for Colonial Development and Welfare up to £5,000,000 per annum for the next ten years. Responsibility for making the new grants would rest with the Secretary of State and the Chancellor of the Exchequer, but a new Advisory Committee would be set up on which he would propose to increase the official element to roughly half the membership.

He proposed, in addition, a separate vote of £500,000 a year for Colonial Research and a Colonial Research Advisory Committee to advise as to the expenditure of this sum. Again, the Secretary of State and the Chancellor of the Exchequer would be responsible for the actual allocation, but he was anxious to get advice through the Committee from the best scientific minds in the country.

Discussion ensued whether an advisory body of distinguished scientists would be best suited to advise on the disposition of a fund of this character. Would scientists have sufficient experience of conditions in the Colonies to enable them to consider competing claims? Scientific specialists were perhaps apt to take a narrow view of claims outside their own particular field.

The Secretary of State for the Colonies said that he contemplated that full reports and information as to the work being carried out in the Colonies would come before the Advisory Committee, and also that they should be in touch with expert opinion in this country, e.g., through the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries and the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research. They would be free to spend part of their funds on research work in this country if they thought fit. There would be an official element on the Committee, e.g., the Agricultural and Medical Advisers of the Colonial Office, and he had in mind to suggest someone with wide Colonial experience as Chairman. For example, he might propose the appointment of Lord Hailey as Chairman both of the Research Advisory Committee and of the Development and Welfare Advisory Committee.

There was general agreement with the view that it was important that there should be a strong non-specialist element on the Research Advisory Committee and that the Chairman, in particular, should be a man of broad experience. It was also urged that the Committee should be encouraged to concentrate on the major problems involved (e.g., those in which the bigger research undertakings are interested), and not to become involved in minor administrative detail.

The Minister without Portfolio said that the publication of the proposed statement of policy would be extremely valuable in connection with the activities of the Mandates Commission of the League of Nations.

The Prime Minister suggested that, if it was contemplated that mandated territories should participate in the proposed Exchequer grants on the same basis as Colonial territories, it was very desirable to make a more conspicuous statement to this effect than the passing reference contained in paragraph (3) of the statement as drafted.

The Secretary of State for the Colonies said that his proposal was that the mandated territories should not be excluded from the proposed schemes, though they would not necessarily be treated on exactly the same basis as the Colonies. There would, for example, be no distinction between Tanganyika and Kenya, but it might be necessary to make some distinction in the case of a Class A mandate such as Palestine, where the Jewish community, at any rate, was
relatively wealthy. He hoped, however, that the proposed fund would be used to assist Arab agricultural development in Palestine.

There was general agreement that Mandated Territories should be treated as on the same basis as Colonies in this matter, and that it was desirable that this fact should be emphasised in the White Paper.

The Secretary of State for the Colonies undertook to insert a paragraph in the draft statement on these lines.

The Lord Privy Seal drew attention to paragraph 15 of the draft statement, in which reference was made to the need for co-operation with the local Colonial authorities, and pointed out that in certain cases the local legislatures would probably oppose reforms.

The Secretary of State for the Colonies said that care would be taken to see that the proposed grants did not merely relieve the Colonial Governments of their responsibilities; they would, in fact, be given only on condition that the Colonial Governments carried out their share of the work. He agreed that it would be wise to include in the paragraph in question a reference to the "responsibilities" of the local legislatures as well as to their "rights and privileges."

The Minister without Portfolio said that, in the absence of the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, he would be seeing the Dominion High Commissioners, and asked if there would be any objection to his informing them, as a matter of courtesy, of the Government's proposal.

The Secretary of State for the Colonies said that he saw no objection and that he would be glad to draft a statement in convenient form for this purpose. He thought, however, that it would suffice if they were informed on the ensuing day.

The view was generally expressed that the proposals in the draft statement represented a very important and desirable development in British Colonial policy.

The War Cabinet—

Authorised the Secretary of State for the Colonies to issue as a White Paper on the 20th February the statement of policy on Colonial Development and Welfare and on Colonial Research in the form annexed to his Memorandum W.P. (G.) (40) 44, subject to its amendment to meet the points made in the discussion (see also Minute 1).

3. The War Cabinet had before them a Joint Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and the Minister of Labour and National Service (W.P. (G.) (40) 43) as to the liability for compulsory military service of British subjects in France, and of French citizens in Great Britain.

The Minister of Labour said that paragraph 3 (2) of the Memorandum had originally been drafted on the basis of the issue of a separate Proclamation for each age group to be called up. We were now following the plan of proclaiming several age groups at a time. This paragraph had therefore been amended to refer specifically to the date on which the men in question would be "required to register," if they were resident in Great Britain.
The schedule of Reserved Occupations would apply both to—

(i) British subjects who returned to this country in pursuance of the Agreement.

(ii) French subjects who elected to remain in this country.

The next step would be the continuance of negotiations with the French Government, and, if these were successful, Parliament would be asked to pass the necessary legislation, as in the Great War.

The War Cabinet—

Approved the proposals of the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and the Minister of Labour and National Service, as set out in their Memorandum W.P. (G.) (40) 43.

4. The Secretary of State for Air said that Bomber Command had carried out a sweep over the North Sea, but no enemy vessels had been sighted.

A reconnaissance had been carried out over Borkum, Juist and Nordeney, but no enemy warships or submarines had been seen. Ice conditions extended about five miles out to sea.

There had been no enemy air activity off the British Isles. Seventy-two fighter patrols had been despatched during the day, involving 204 aircraft. The usual patrols had been flown by Coastal Command.

There was no activity to report from the British air forces in France.

The War Cabinet took note of this statement.

5. The Deputy Chief of Naval Staff gave the War Cabinet certain details regarding the present movements of the Home Fleet.

The hunt for the remaining four merchant ships which had left Vigo had continued during the previous day without result.

The British Sultan Star (12,000 tons), carrying an important cargo of meat, had been torpedoed South-West of Land’s End on the previous afternoon. Being a fast liner she had not been in convoy, and was the first fast ship which had been torpedoed.

Three destroyers, who were within 30 miles, had arrived on the scene and rescued the crew. These destroyers had obtained a contact close to the Sultan Star just after she had sunk, and had attacked. The U-boat had been seen to break surface and then disappear in such a manner as to give reason for believing that she had been sunk.

The British tanker Imperial Transport had been torpedoed 150 miles West-north-west of the Butt of Lewis on the afternoon of the 11th February. Her bow had been blown off, but she was still able to steam 4 knots. She was being escorted home by a destroyer.

Divers had arrived at the Clyde to examine the U-boat which had been sunk there.

The War Cabinet took note of the above statement.
The Military Situation.

(Previous Reference: W.M. (40) 41st Conclusions, Minute 3.)

Western Front.

The Chief of the Imperial General Staff said that there was nothing to report from the Western Front.

The Finns had acknowledged losing certain positions in the Summa area. They were holding their own North of Lake Ladoga. In Central Finland they had succeeded in wiping out another Russian battalion.

The general situation was reported to be stable. Though the Finns were tired, there was no question of their being exhausted. The real reason for the seeming setback which they were now suffering was their lack of ammunition for field guns. This imposed very severe restrictions on expenditure and meant that they had to forego anything but the most profitable targets. They were outranged by an overwhelming concentration of some 600 Russian guns, but for all that their casualties had not been serious. By contrast, the Russians had lost some 80,000 to 90,000 killed, and their morale was deplorable.

The War Cabinet took note of the above statement.

Assistance to Finland.

(Previous Reference: W.M. (40) 41st Conclusions, Minute 3.)

Supply of aircraft. Pilots.

The Secretary of State for Air informed the War Cabinet that the final preparation of 12 short-nosed Blenheims was being completed, and that these would be ready to be flown to Finland in ten days’ time.

In this connection the Secretary of State for Air raised the question whether the War Cabinet would see any objection to these aircraft being flown to Finland by volunteer R.A.F. crews who would remain there to fight against the Russians. From the operational point of view the opportunity of fighting in Finland would give R.A.F. pilots and crews valuable training and experience. There would be no lack of volunteers. They would have to resign their commissions, and special consideration would have to be given to such matters as their pay, non-effective benefits, and subsequent re-employment in this country. Some 24 volunteers might go to Finland with the 12 Blenheims, but this initial step might involve us in further commitments, by way of reinforcements. Contingents of volunteers might, with advantage, be sent out for pre-arranged periods and be relieved by succeeding contingents, on the lines which had been practised by the Germans and Italians in Spain.

The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs saw no objection from the political point of view, provided the personnel were represented as volunteers. The only objections he saw were the difficulties which might be raised by Sweden and the embarrassment which might be caused if British crews were taken prisoner by the Russians. If, however, the War Cabinet were prepared to agree to volunteer air crews proceeding to Finland, might there not be even greater advantage in sending British personnel with the Hurricanes which were about to go to Finland?
The Lord Privy Seal considered that the despatch of British flying personnel to Finland would probably produce results out of all proportion to their numbers, and he was therefore strongly in favour of their going. General agreement was expressed with this view provided that it was administratively practicable.

The Chief of the Imperial General Staff said that orders had been given for the immediate withdrawal of 30 field guns from reserve for despatch to Finland in accordance with the decision taken by the War Cabinet on the previous day. In reply to the Prime Minister, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff undertook to report full details to the War Cabinet on the following day as to the date when these guns and the ammunition for them would leave. General Gamelin's reply to a suggestion that field guns might be made available from France had not been favourable. The explanation, possibly, was that the French had sent all available surplus guns to the Balkans and, having regard to the ten additional Divisions which they were in process of forming, were unable to spare any for Finland.

Meanwhile, the 24 field howitzers, each with 2,000 rounds, already despatched from this country, had now arrived in Finland. They should shortly be in action and should go far to improve the situation.

Railway delays in Sweden has been partly due to the moving of two Swedish Divisions northwards to Boden. The position should improve as a result of the despatch of seven railway experts from this country—two to Sweden and five to Torneo, where they were straightening out a considerable confusion of wagons, in close co-operation with the Finnish staff.

The Lord Privy Seal thought it important that our transportation experts should have a real knowledge of the Swedish railway system, and be of such standing as to be able to talk on level terms to the higher Swedish railway authorities.

The Prime Minister said that he had seen the Finnish Minister on the previous day and had helped to reassure him. M. Gripenberg had asked whether we could not intercede with the French. In view of General Gamelin's reply to the appeal of the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, he (the Prime Minister) thought it might be opportune for him to make a personal appeal to M. Daladier. He could say that the British Government had considered it worth while to make considerable sacrifices on behalf of the Finns; and he could ask whether the French could not see their way to making similar sacrifices, particularly in regard to the possible release of field guns, of which the Finns had such great need.

The War Cabinet—

(i) Authorised the Secretary of State for Air if, on further investigation, a workable scheme could be devised, to arrange for a limited number of R.A.F. flying personnel to proceed to Finland, in the guise of volunteers, for the purpose of fighting against Russia; such personnel to proceed with the Blenheim aircraft (or possibly with the Hurricane aircraft) which were shortly to be sent to Finland.

(ii) Invited the Prime Minister to address a personal appeal to M. Daladier to release field guns and ammunition for Finland.

(iii) Invited the Chief of the Imperial General Staff to report to the War Cabinet at their meeting on the following day details regarding the despatch to Finland of the 30 field guns and 30,000 rounds of ammunition.
8. The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs said that the latest telegrams from His Majesty's Ambassador, Rome (Nos. 126, 127 and 128, dated the 14th February, 1940), suggested that the prospects of obtaining the proposed Trade Agreement had become more unfavourable. In an interview on the 13th February, 1940, Count Ciano had said that the Duce felt sure that His Majesty's Government would understand that in view of his special relations with Germany, he could not honourably permit the sale to us or to France of guns, anti-aircraft guns, explosives and other weapons of destruction. In the same conversation Count Ciano had again asked about German sea-borne coal; was any date fixed for its stoppage? Sir Percy Loraine had replied, not to his knowledge; he supposed that no action would be taken until the Master of the Rolls had reached London and reported to the War Cabinet. He imagined, however, that it was quite likely that seizures would begin in the following week. Count Ciano had then said: "As soon as that?" To which Sir Percy Loraine had contented himself with replying that the original date of enforcement had been mid-December last. As to Count Ciano's statement that Italy was now rearming, Sir Percy Loraine had told him that if, as was probable, she was unable to obtain the necessary raw materials outside the sterling area, she would have to come to us to obtain them. If she sought such assistance, he (Sir Percy Loraine) thought that any British Government would inquire against whom the armaments thus created were to be used, and would ask for guarantees against their being used against us or our Allies. The Italian Government could therefore be under no illusions as to the nature of the situation created by Signor Mussolini's veto.

The Prime Minister said that there were many forces in Italy anxious to secure the proposed Trade Agreement with us. He felt, therefore, that, if we did not act too hurriedly, there was a good chance that Italian policy might develop in the direction that we desired.

The War Cabinet took note of the above statement.

9. The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs gave the War Cabinet certain information regarding the internal situation in Italy. This information is recorded in the Secretary's Standard File of War Cabinet Conclusions.

The War Cabinet took note of the statement by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.

Richmond Terrace, S.W. 1, February 15, 1940.