WAR CABINET 62 (45).

CONCLUSIONS of a Meeting of the War Cabinet held in the Prime Minister's Room, House of Commons, S.W. 1, on Friday, 18th May, 1945, at noon.

Present:
The Right Hon. WINSTON S. CHURCHILL, M.P., Prime Minister (in the Chair). The Right Hon. C. R. ATTLEE, M.P., Lord President of the Council.
The Right Hon. Sir JOHN ANDERSON, M.P., Chancellor of the Exchequer.
The Right Hon. OLIVER LYTTELTON, M.P., Minister of Production.
The Right Hon. The Earl of SELBORNE, Minister of Economic Warfare.

The following were also present:
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. R. S. HUDSON, M.P., Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries (Items 1-3). Colonel the Right Hon. OLIVER STANLEY, M.P., Secretary of State for the Colonies.
Colonel the Right Hon. J. J. LLEWELLYN, M.P., Minister of Food (Items 1-4).
The Right Hon. DUNCAN SANDYS, M.P., Minister of Works (Items 1-3).
The Right Hon. the Earl of SELBORNE, Minister of Economic Warfare (Items 1-3).

The Earl of MUNSTER, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Home Office (Items 1-3).

Secretariat:
Sir EDWARD BRIDGES.
Mr. NORMAN BROOK.
Sir GILBERT LAITHWAITE.
Mr. W. S. MURRIE.
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Yenezia Giulia.

1. The War Cabinet were informed of the latest developments in connection with the military situation in Venezia Giulia.

Reference: W.M. (45) 60th Conclusions.

Laval.

2. The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs recalled that Pierre Laval with his wife and family had recently left Germany by air and had landed in Barcelona, where they had been interned. The French Government had demanded that Laval should be surrendered to them for trial. The Spanish Government, while not desiring to retain Laval in Spain, were unwilling to surrender him directly to the French and claimed that this course would be inconsistent with their extradition laws. They had, however, indicated that they were willing to put him on board a British ship, in which he could be taken to the nearest French port and there handed over to the French authorities. The United States Government were now pressing us to agree to this procedure.

In discussion, the view was expressed that, while we should support the French in their demand that Laval should be surrendered to them, there was no reason why we should implicate ourselves in irregular means of securing his transfer to French custody. Nor was it reasonable that the United States Government should press us to do so. It would be preferable to deal with this situation by reference to the declared view of the Allied Governments that neutral Governments should not afford asylum to enemy leaders and war criminals. The United States Government should be urged to join with us in bringing pressure to bear on the Spanish Government to surrender Laval direct to the French authorities.

The War Cabinet—

Invited the Foreign Secretary to deal with the matter on these lines.

Prisoners of War.

3. The War Cabinet had before them the following papers about the employment of German prisoners of war outside Germany after the end of hostilities in Europe:

W.P. (45) 292—by the Secretary of State for War.
W.P. (45) 304—by the Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries.
W.P. (45) 309—by the Minister of Economic Warfare.

The Secretary of State for War said that the estimates put forward by Departments of their requirements for German prisoner-of-war labour totalled 750,000 for employment in the United Kingdom and 150,000 for employment overseas. The number of German prisoners of war in the United Kingdom at 31st March was only 160,000, of whom about 40,000 were employed. To meet the requirements put forward by Departments, it would be necessary to transfer an additional 570,000 German prisoners to this country. This seemed to be quite out of the question. He therefore suggested that the right course was to retain the German prisoners already in this country and put the maximum number of them to work; to import additional German prisoners to replace Italian prisoners of war when they were repatriated; and, for the rest, not to bring to this country more German prisoners than could be dealt with without resort to billeting, the building of fresh accommodation or the retention for guard duties of any appreciable number of soldiers who might otherwise be demobilised. In selecting additional German prisoners we should choose men with the required skill for
the work on which they would be employed; but, subject to this, we should employ Nazis rather than non-Nazis. The 60,000 German prisoners of war required for labour purposes in connection with the war against Japan should be obtained, and the Dominions and India should be notified of our policy and asked whether they would require any additional German prisoners of war. If our Allies, other than the Russians, asked for prisoners of war to help to restore damage to their countries, we should accede to their requests.

The Minister of Labour and National Service said that he agreed that the estimates of numbers given in Appendix A to W.P. (45) 292 were unrealistic. He felt that the first steps should be to relax the present security requirements so as to reduce the number of guards required and enable German prisoners to be employed on a wider range of work than agriculture and forestry. The Service Departments should make available accommodation for prisoners of war by the release of huddled camps. In particular, the Air Ministry should be able to release a good deal of suitable accommodation in areas where there were large numbers of airfields, which were now only partly manned, by concentrating their establishments in a smaller number of airfields. He did not favour an immediate transfer to this country of a large number of additional German prisoners, but thought that we should import them gradually as the demands for their services actually materialised.

In discussion, doubts were expressed as to the wisdom of increasing substantially the number of German prisoners of war in this country. In particular, there seemed to be no case for bringing to this country or retaining in it any further prisoners of extreme Nazi views who were not likely to do useful work and might create trouble. Moreover, was there not a risk of unrest if German prisoners of war were employed in this country at a time when there was likely to be some unemployment among British workers, even though it was only local and temporary?

On the other hand, it was said that to carry out the food production programme it was essential to employ German prisoners in greater numbers than had so far been authorised. The importance of obtaining German prisoner-of-war labour for work on the preparation of housing sites was also stressed.

The general view of the War Cabinet was that in the first instance every effort should be made to make the maximum use of the German prisoners of war in this country. Those prisoners of war now in this country who, because of their extreme Nazi views, could not easily be employed here, should be returned to Germany, where they could be put to work under more onerous conditions, suitable non-Nazi prisoners of war being brought to this country to replace them, as opportunity arose. Plans could be made on the assumption that Italian prisoners of war would not be returned to Italy for some months to come; and no steps should be taken for their return without further reference to the War Cabinet. The detailed arrangements should be worked out by the Inter-Departmental Committee on the Allocation of Prisoners of War.

The War Cabinet’s conclusions were as follows:

(1) As many as possible of the German prisoners now in this country should be put to work, and, with this in view, the existing limitation on the total numbers to be employed in agriculture and forestry was removed, and restrictions on the conditions of employment of prisoners, both in agriculture and forestry and in other industries, should be suitably relaxed. The Inter-Departmental Committee on the employment of prisoners of war should consider how the available prisoners should be distributed among the Departments who required their services.

(2) German prisoners who by reason of their extreme Nazi views could not easily be put to work in the United Kingdom, should, so far as practicable, be returned to Germany.
To replace prisoners returned to Germany, an equivalent number of non-Nazi prisoners should be transferred to the United Kingdom as opportunity arose. In selecting these prisoners, regard should be had to the type of work for which they were needed.

The Minister of Labour and National Service and the Secretary of State for War should make a further report to the War Cabinet in due course, so that the question of bringing further prisoners of war to this country for employment could be reviewed in the light of the progress made in giving effect to the conclusions recorded above.

Shipping. 4. The War Cabinet considered a Memorandum by the Secretary of State for India (W.P. (45) 288) on wheat imports for India.

The Secretary of State for India said that when in January of this year the Government of India had undertaken to accept the additional economic strain arising from approved operations to be based in India, they had done so on the understanding that His Majesty's Government would provide 70,000 tons of food grains in each of the first four months of 1945, and would thereafter do their best to secure and transport the reasonable requirements of India for food grains on a scale sufficient to enable the Government of India to forestall shortages and maintain control of prices.

Since then a deterioration in the internal supply situation had reduced India's supplies by some 200,000 tons, while for shipping reasons there had been a shortfall of 190,000 tons in imports during the four months. The Chiefs of Staff had recorded the view that if military requirements were to be met the necessary food grains must be imported, both to secure the stability of India as a base. The Government of India had now assessed their need for loadings over the year March 1945 to February 1946 at just under 1½ million tons with a high rate of arrival in the critical summer months.

In these circumstances he had asked the Food Grains Committee for (i) a shipment of 50,000 tons as an emergency measure; (ii) loadings at the rate of 135,000 tons a month from May to August (July to October arrival), the position to be re-examined in July; and (iii) permission to make an announcement in Parliament of future intentions in general terms. The Minister of War Transport had, however, been unable to offer more than a target figure of 65,000 to 70,000 tons a month, subject to War Cabinet approval.

This target figure would be quite insufficient to meet India's needs. If wheat on the scale for which he had asked could be provided, he would be ready to press India to find the additional 25,000 tons of rice which the Minister of Food was anxious to secure for Ceylon and to release in addition 200,000 tons of ground nuts; but a firm figure for wheat deliveries to India, preferably of 135,000 tons for the next four months, was essential if operational demands were to be met. He trusted that, as hostilities in Europe had now ended, the Minister of War Transport would find less difficulty in meeting this demand than he had when the matter was considered by the Food Grains Committee earlier in the month.

In discussion the following points were made:

(a) There was general agreement that it was of great importance to secure from India 25,000 tons of rice for Ceylon, 200,000 tons of ground nuts for the United Kingdom.

(b) The Minister of War Transport emphasised his difficulty in working to a firm programme, pending the outcome of the forthcoming shipping survey. Full account had to be taken of operational demands and of the programme for liberated areas, and if extra tonnage was to be found for India it could only be at the cost of other claimants. Moreover, he doubted whether it would be possible
to procure at the ports for shipment any more wheat than that which he had already arranged to ship to Europe in the next few months.

(c) The Minister of War Transport suggested that, in any event, the Indian demand for 135,000 tons per month was excessive and a figure of 100,000 tons would meet the requirements of the Government of India.

The Secretary of State for India said that if he could get 100,000 tons a month firm over the next six months he would be prepared to insist that the Government of India should meet the demands of Ceylon for rice and of the United Kingdom for 200,000 tons of ground nuts.

(d) The Secretary of State for Air felt that, in any decision, full consideration should be given to the possible effect on operations in South-East Asia Command.

The Prime Minister said that the general sense of the War Cabinet was that India's demands on the scale indicated by the Secretary of State for India (at (c) above) should be met, if possible, subject to a clear prior understanding that the Government of India should in return provide 25,000 tons of rice for Ceylon and 200,000 tons of ground nuts for the United Kingdom.

The War Cabinet—

Endorsed the conclusion suggested by the Prime Minister, as summarised above, and agreed that a Committee consisting of—

- The Minister of Reconstruction (in the Chair),
- The Secretary of State for India,
- The Minister of War Transport,
- The Minister of Food,
- The Paymaster-General,

should work out detailed arrangements for giving practical effect to this conclusion.

Social Insurance.

5. The War Cabinet had before them a Memorandum by the Minister of National Insurance (W.P. (45) 305) asking for authority to introduce the National Insurance (Industrial Injuries) Bill.

The War Cabinet were informed that the proposals embodied in the draft Bill differed in certain respects from those contained in Part II of the White Paper on Social Insurance (Cmd. 6551 of 1944). These differences had been examined by the Reconstruction Committee, who had endorsed the changes embodied in the draft Bill. The text of the Bill had been approved by the Legislation Committee.

If authority were given for the introduction of the Bill, the Minister of National Insurance proposed to present to Parliament simultaneously a White Paper (the draft of which was annexed to W.P. (45) 305) explaining how the proposals in the Bill differed from those in the White Paper on the Industrial Injuries Scheme (Cmd. 6551), and how they were related to the proposals in the general scheme of Social Insurance (Cmd. 6550).

The War Cabinet—

Authorised the Minister of National Insurance to proceed with the introduction of the National Insurance (Industrial Injuries) Bill and the simultaneous presentation of a White Paper on the Bill in the terms of the draft annexed to W.P. (45) 305.
6. The Minister of Labour and National Service said that in his statement in the House of Commons on the 16th May he had explained the stages by which he proposed to bring into effect the arrangements for the re-distribution of man-power between civilian employments following the end of hostilities in Europe, and had indicated that this process of re-distribution would begin without delay. The plans which he had announced conformed in all respects with the scheme set out in the White Paper on Re-allocation of Man-Power between Civilian Employments (Cmd. 6568 of 1944). To operate these plans it would be necessary to replace the existing provisions for the control of engagements by a single Control of Engagement Order covering all employments; and he had indicated in his statement that this new Order would be made during the next few days. He asked for the authority of the War Cabinet to proceed at once with the making of this Order.

The War Cabinet—

Authorised the Minister of Labour and National Service to proceed forthwith with the making of a new Control of Engagement Order on the lines indicated in paragraph 34 of Cmd. 6568.

Offices of the War Cabinet, S.W. 1,
18th May, 1945.