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W.M. (40)

128th Conclusions.

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WAR CABINET 128 (40).

CONCLUSIONS of a Meeting of the War Cabinet held at 10 Downing Street, S.W. 1, on Saturday, May 18, 1940, at 5.30 P.M.

Present :

The Right Hon. WINSTON S. CHURCHILL, M.P., Prime Minister (*in the Chair*).

The Right Hon. NEVILLE CHAMBERLAIN, M.P., Lord President of the Council.	The Right Hon. C. R. ATTLEE, M.P., Lord Privy Seal.
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The Right Hon. VISCOUNT HALIFAX, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.	The Right Hon. A. GREENWOOD, M.P., Minister without Portfolio.
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The following were also present :

The Right Hon. Sir JOHN ANDERSON, M.P., Secretary of State for the Home Department and Minister of Home Security.	The Right Hon. LORD HANKEY, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster.
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The Hon. Sir ALEXANDER CADOGAN, Permanent Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.	Sir THOMAS PHILLIPS, Permanent Secretary, Minister of Labour.
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Secretariat.

Sir EDWARD BRIDGES.

Group Captain W. ELLIOT.

Mr. D. H. F. RICKETT.

WAR CABINET 128 (40).

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The War Effort.

Need for
additional
powers.

1. *The Lord President of the Council* made an oral statement in regard to certain additional powers which it might be necessary to confer on the Government in the event of the threat of attack on this country becoming imminent.

A preliminary discussion took place, the main points of which are recorded in the Secretary's Standard File of War Cabinet Conclusions.

The War Cabinet :—

Invited the Lord President of the Council to continue his consultations with the Ministers and Departments concerned, with a view to the preparation of a detailed scheme which could be applied if circumstances should render this necessary.

Civil Defence Measures.

Dispersal of
persons resident
in the immediate
neighbourhood
of specific
targets.

(Previous
Reference:
W.M. (40) 118th
Conclusions,
Minute 5.)

2. The War Cabinet had before them a Note by the Lord President of the Council covering a Memorandum by the Home Secretary on the dispersal of persons resident in the immediate neighbourhood of specific targets (W.P. (G.) (40) 130).

The Lord President of the Council drew attention to the first recommendation, namely, that no attempt should be made to arrange for voluntary dispersal of population until there had been such air attack on this country as would bring home clearly to people the dangers to which they were exposed. Events on the Continent might have a rapid and considerable effect upon public opinion in this respect.

The Prime Minister thought that the Germans would not adopt a policy of indiscriminate bombing. Their action in Norway and Poland could not be taken as a guide. In attacking this country they would find it far more profitable to concentrate on specific military targets.

The Home Secretary said that he had arranged for public feeling to be continuously tested and for persuasion to be applied both by school-teachers and by civil defence officials. So far the response had been small. It was essential to secure the co-operation both of parents of children to be evacuated, and of householders in the reception areas. Preparations had been made to deal with the hurried exodus of the population which might take place if bombing was heavy.

The War Cabinet agreed :—

To request the Home Secretary to watch the situation from day to day and to take the action recommended in paragraph 4 of his Memorandum as soon as he was satisfied that there would be a favourable response from the public.

Invasion of Great Britain.

Aliens and the
Fifth Column.

(Previous
Reference:
W.M. (40) 123rd
Conclusions,
Minute 15.)

3. The War Cabinet had before them a Memorandum by the Home Secretary on "Invasion of Great Britain: possible co-operation of a Fifth Column" (W.P. (G.) (40) 131).

The Home Secretary explained the steps which had already been taken in regard to enemy aliens.

In the discussion which ensued on the various further measures of internment dealt with in the Memorandum, the following points were made :—

- (1) The task of picking up and sorting out aliens imposed a very heavy burden on the Police, who must not be asked to carry too heavy a burden at any given moment.

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To request the Home Secretary to watch the situation from day to day and to take the action recommended in paragraph 4 of his Memorandum as soon as he was satisfied that there would be a favourable response from the public.

Invasion of Great Britain, Aliens and the Fifth Column.

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The Home Secretary explained the steps which had already been taken in regard to enemy aliens.

In the discussion which ensued on the various further measures of internment dealt with in the Memorandum, the following points were made :—

- (1) The task of picking up and sorting out aliens imposed a very heavy burden on the Police, who must not be asked to carry too heavy a burden at any given moment.

- (2) In this connection, the Police already had a very heavy task on hand in dealing with 100,000 refugees who were on their way to this country, mostly from Belgium. The Home Secretary regretted that we had already undertaken to receive another 100,000 refugees, but he hoped that this number might be cut down. Any Germans found in the batches of refugees reaching this country would at once be interned on arrival.
- (3) If war broke out with Italy, it was proposed to intern all male Italians who had been less than 20 years in this country and such British Italians as were members of the Fascist Party.
- (4) The Home Secretary thought that, if it was felt to be desirable to impose some further restrictions on enemy aliens, this should take the form of imposing further restrictions on exempted enemy aliens who lived outside the special military zone, subject to exceptions in particular cases. If this course were adopted, the same restrictions should also be imposed on non-enemy aliens who had been here for less than five years.
- (5) The extent of the danger to be apprehended from women refugees was open to argument. The Home Secretary was, however, prepared to intern all women enemy aliens in category B as soon as the necessary organisation had been established to cope with them.
- (6) The question was raised whether the upper age limit of 60 was appropriate, seeing that men above this age might well be actively engaged in organising enemy activities.
- (7) In regard to British Fascists, the Home Secretary explained at length the difficulty of taking any effective action in the absence of evidence which indicated that the organisation as such was engaged in disloyal activities.
- (8) The view was expressed that the position in Eire was a very dangerous one. The difficulty was to see how to deal with it, failing some easement of the relations between the North and South.

The Prime Minister summed up the discussion by saying that he thought the general view of the War Cabinet was that it would be desirable to stiffen up the measures already taken.

The Home Secretary was invited to review the matter in consultation with the Lord Privy Seal and the Minister without Portfolio, in the light of the above discussion, and to report again to the War Cabinet within a week's time.

*Richmond Terrace, S.W. 1,
May 18, 1940.*

