CONCLUSIONS of a Meeting of the War Cabinet held at 10 Downing Street, S.W. 1, on Wednesday, September 4, 1940, at 11 a.m.

Present:

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


The Right Hon. A. GREENWOOD, M.P., Minister without Portfolio.

The Right Hon. VISCOUNT HALIFAX, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.

The Right Hon. LORD BEAVERBROOK, Minister of Aircraft Production.

The following were also present:

The Right Hon. Sir KINGSLEY WOOD, M.P., Chancellor of the Exchequer.

The Right Hon. L. C. M. S. AMERY, M.P., Secretary of State for India and Burma (Items 1–5).

The Right Hon. R. S. HUDSON, M.P., Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries (Item 6).

Sir HORACE SEYMOUR, Assistant Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs (Items 1–4).

The Right Hon. VISCOUNT CALDECOTE, Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs (Items 1–4).

The Right Hon. ANTHONY EDEN, M.P., Secretary of State for War (Items 6–8).

Mr. RALPH ASShetON, M.P., Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Labour (Item 6).

Air Marshal R. E. C. PEIRSE, Vice-Chief of the Air Staff (Item 5).

Secretariat.

Sir EDWARD BRIDGES.
Mr. W. D. WILKINSON.
WAR CABINET 251 (40).

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French Colonies.

1. The attention of the War Cabinet was drawn to a report that Martinique was moving in an anti-Vichy direction, and that a plebiscite was likely to be held in the island.

The War Cabinet—

Invited the Foreign Secretary to consider whether United States influence could be brought to bear against the Vichy elements at Martinique and to instruct Lord Lothian to take any steps in his power.

Aircraft Production.

2. The Prime Minister informed the War Cabinet that the Air Ministry had temporarily stopped the export of Hurricanes overseas. It was hoped that this measure would not be in force for long.

The Minister for Aircraft Production asked whether he could now be given authority not to fit further Hurricanes with special Middle East equipment.

The Prime Minister thought that this measure would be premature. The position was constantly under review.

The War Cabinet took note of the above statements.

Aircraft Production.

3. The Minister of Aircraft Production reported that on Saturday, 31st August, 700 men had left Castle Bromwich factory at lunch time without authorisation, and a further 700 at 5 P.M.; 3,500 men had remained at work over the week-end, but there was a marked disinclination on the part of the men to continue at work after an air raid warning had been sounded. Production had already fallen off and prompt action was necessary if the situation was not to deteriorate further. He would like to see the sounding of the sirens discontinued.

In discussion, the following points were made:

(1) It was generally agreed that the operation of the air raid warning system ought to be modified. The existing system had been framed to meet the contingency of air raids which would create very great destruction, and was not suitable for the sort of conditions now being experienced.

The Prime Minister referred to the suggestions outlined at the Cabinet two days earlier for modifying the warning system in regard to which discussions were proceeding.

(2) For a year it had been impressed on workers that it was their duty to take cover when the sirens sounded. The habit had become ingrained, and a new outlook was wanted.

(3) The Government had ample legal powers to compel men to remain at work. But it would be a grave decision to apply compulsion to skilled workers in the aircraft industry.

(4) A more suitable method would be the withdrawal of protection from service with the forces. But, before consideration was given to this or any other method, a full report should be obtained as to the local conditions in this factory, and the Minister of Labour should be consulted.
(5) It would be difficult to keep secret any measures found necessary to induce munition workers to continue at work; and there was a risk of affording encouragement to the enemy. The first step might well be that the men should be addressed by some national figure, who could bring them to a better realisation of the position.

The War Cabinet—

Invited the Lord Privy Seal to investigate these matters, in consultation with the other Ministers concerned, in the course of the day, and to report to a Meeting of the War Cabinet to be held at 9.30 p.m. that evening.

The Far East.

The Burma Road.

(Previous Reference: W.M. (40) 239th Conclusions, Minute 9.)

4. The War Cabinet had before them a Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs (W.P. (40) 348) about the Burma Road Agreement. What was to happen after the 17th October, when His Majesty’s Government could either continue or discontinue the present partial closure of this route?

The Foreign Secretary said that the factor most likely to influence the Far Eastern situation in our favour before the 17th October would be the successful termination of the Battle of Britain. In the meantime we ought so to handle the situation as to leave ourselves free to reopen the road, if we should decide to do so. To this end we should decline to allow the Japanese to extend the scope of the existing agreement, and should emphasise its temporary nature, and the fact that it involved the fulfilment of an obligation on the part of Japan.

In discussion the following points were made:

(1) The Burma Road situation had been overtaken by the Indo-China situation, on which the facts were far from clear. The Japanese Foreign Office had denied a report that they had presented an ultimatum on the 1st September, demanding the right to send their troops through Indo-China.

(2) If Japan attempted a military occupation of Indo-China, this brought Burma under air threat from Japanese forces.

(3) Could the United States be persuaded to take any action? A great moral effect would be produced on the Japanese if President Roosevelt were to send one American Cruiser Squadron to Singapore, on a ceremonial visit.

(4) Would aggression against Indo-China make Japan stronger or weaker in the military and economic spheres? If the French Government of Indo-China and the local population put up a good resistance, the Japanese might become considerably involved, and pro tanto discouraged from further adventure. A Report was required on this point from the Chiefs of Staff.

(5) The Foreign Secretary said that he had instructed his Department to consider, in consultation with the other Departments concerned, whether we could offer any economic inducements to Japan which would prove so attractive as to keep her on the paths of virtue.

(6) The Prime Minister said that, if the present air battle went in our favour, it would greatly increase our prestige. But it would not materially affect the military position vis-à-vis Japan. A war with Japan would fundamentally affect our strategy in the Middle East. The right course was to go some way in offering inducements
to Japan, and possibly also to go some way in using threats, but not to commit ourselves irrevocably to forcible action.

The War Cabinet—

(a) Invited the Foreign Secretary to sound the United States Government about the possibility of their sending a Cruiser Squadron to Singapore, on a ceremonial visit.

(b) Invited the Chiefs of Staff to report to what extent an extension of the Far Eastern hostilities to Indo-China would be likely to cause military or economic embarrassment to Japan, on the assumption that effective resistance was offered by the Government and population of Indo-China, aided perhaps by the Chinese.

India.

5. The War Cabinet had before them Memoranda by the Secretary of State for India and the Minister without Portfolio (W. P. (G.) (40) 219 and 231) in regard to a scheme for the manufacture of aircraft in India.

The following points were made in discussion:

(1) The Secretary of State for India said that the scheme would make no immediate demands for aero-engines. Sixty Fighter engines would be required, beginning next April, and 90 Bomber engines beginning towards the end of 1941. If need be, these dates could be postponed. It was, however, important that authority should be given which would enable orders to be placed and the scheme to go forward.

(2) On a long term view it would be strategically advantageous to have a factory in India for the manufacture of aircraft. The scheme was also valuable as extending the existing facilities for the repair of aircraft in India.

(3) The scheme was strongly urged by the Viceroy.

(4) The Minister of Aircraft Production said that the output of completed aircraft was conditioned by the engines available. We had contracted for every available engine which could be obtained in America. If the scheme went through it would mean that engines would not be available for a number of air frames which had been ordered, and which would be wasted.

(5) Demands for aero-engines were being made by all the Dominions. He would be greatly handicapped in refusing these demands if the present scheme was approved.

(6) The Vice-Chief of the Air Staff said that on a long term basis the scheme had attractions, but on a short term view seemed unlikely to be worth while.

(7) The Prime Minister said that Germany was no doubt planning to organise aircraft production in all the enslaved countries of Europe. We must be prepared to meet aircraft production on a European scale. We could only do this if we used the most efficient centres of production and we must not dissipate our resources.

(8) While the present air battle continued, we must direct all our energies to making ourselves as strong as possible; but if matters developed favourably for us, it might be possible to reconsider long term projects of this nature.
The War Cabinet—

(i) Withheld approval from the scheme proposed by the Secretary of State for India in his Memorandum of the 21st August (W.P. (G.) (40) 219).

(ii) Agreed that further consideration might be given to this scheme in, say, two months' time.

Harvest Work. 6. The War Cabinet had before them two Memoranda by the Secretary of State for War (W.P. (G.) (40) 323 and H.P.C. (40) 276) about employing troops in harvesting.

Should the troops so employed be paid extra? The Secretary of State for War said that, while troops who had volunteered for harvesting last year had been paid a shilling a day extra, it was not thought suitable that the men would this year be detailed for harvesting should be paid.

The Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Labour, said that from the Ministry of Labour’s point of view it would be desirable that they should receive some extra pay.

The general view of the Cabinet was that they should not be paid, but should be given free beer by the farmers. The Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries explained that arrangements would be made for the cost of the beer to be deducted by the farmers from the sum paid by them to the Army authorities in respect of the men’s labour.

Hop-picking. The Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries explained that at the moment it was only proposed to use soldiers for hop-picking. It might be necessary to use them later for the potato and sugar-beet crop. 20,000 hop-pickers were required at once. It seemed unlikely that the full requirements could be met by the employment of soldiers. Many of the hop-fields were in prohibited area, and the Regional Commissioner had not allowed hop-pickers from London to take their children with them. As a result, many had returned to London. The War Cabinet thought that, in the circumstances, the ban on children accompanying hop-pickers should be removed.

The War Cabinet:—

(1) Approved the policy of employing troops on harvest work. Soldiers detailed for this work should receive their army pay without addition, but arrangements should be made for them to get free beer.

(2) Invited the Home Secretary to instruct the Regional Commissioner for South-East England that children should be allowed to accompany hop-pickers.

The Colonies. 7. The Lord Privy Seal said that Lord Winterton had proposed that there should be a Debate in the House of Commons on the extent of the war effort of the Colonies. The view of the Colonial Secretary, with which he agreed, was that such a Debate at the present time would be undesirable and would raise awkward issues, including questions affecting Palestine.

The Prime Minister agreed with this view. If a debate were insisted on, however, he favoured a statement in general terms that the war effort of the Colonies greatly exceeded the effort which they had made in the late war.
The War Cabinet agreed:—

That it was undesirable to have a debate in Parliament at the present time on the Colonies war effort, and that the Lord Privy Seal should therefore ask that the debate should be postponed.

The Balkans.

8. The Foreign Secretary read to the War Cabinet an extract from the draft of a statement which he proposed to make in the House of Lords on the 5th September in regard to the recent territorial changes in Roumania. The draft statement was to the effect that His Majesty's Government favoured modifications of the status quo, provided always that such modifications were just and equitable in themselves, and were reached by means of free and peaceful negotiation and agreement between the interested parties and not by methods of aggression or compulsion. It followed that they were unable to accept the settlement of the Hungarian-Roumanian dispute over Transylvania which had recently been announced. It was not their intention to recognise during the war territorial changes which had evidently not been freely agreed between all the parties concerned, but it was their hope that at the end of the war there might be a general settlement on lines so just and equitable that it would be assured of durability, and they would be prepared to use all their influence to this end.

The War Cabinet approved a statement on these lines.

Richmond Terrace, S.W. 1,
September 4, 1940.