CONCLUSIONS of a Meeting of the War Cabinet, held in the Cabinet War Room, S.W. 1, on Friday, October 25, 1940, at 11.30 A.M.

Present:
The Right Hon. WINSTON S. CHURCHILL, M.P., Prime Minister (in the Chair).
The Right Hon. VISCOUNT HALIFAX, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs (Items 1-5).
The Right Hon. LORD BEAVERBROOK, Minister of Aircraft Production.
The Right Hon. WALTER ROSS, M.P., Chancellor of the Exchequer.
The Right Hon. GEORGE TRENCHARD, M.P., Secretary of State for Air.
The Right Hon. ARTHUR Greenwood, M.P., Minister without Portfolio.
The Right Hon. A. V. ALEXANDER, M.P., First Lord of the Admiralty (Items 1-5).
The Right Hon. MALCOLM MACDONALD, M.P., Minister of Health (Items 5-8).
The Right Hon. J. T. C. LORD LLOYD, Secretary of State for the Colonies (Item 5).
The Right Hon. J. R. ERNEST BEVIN, M.P., Minister of Labour and Minister of National Service.
The Right Hon. VISCOUNT CRANBORNE, M.P., Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs (Items 1-5).
The Right Hon. LORD CROSS, M.P., Minister of Shipping (Item 5).
The Right Hon. R. H. Croft, M.P., President of the Council.
The Right Hon. A. GREENWOOD, M.P., Minister without Portfolio.
The Right Hon. J. T. C. LORD LLOYD, Secretary of State for the Colonies (Item 5).
The Right Hon. VISCOUNT CRANBORNE, M.P., Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs (Items 1-5).
The Right Hon. A. V. ALEXANDER, M.P., First Lord of the Admiralty (Items 1-5).
The Right Hon. MALCOLM MACDONALD, M.P., Minister of Health (Items 5-8).
The Right Hon. R. H. Cross, M.P., Minister of Shipping (Item 5).
Admiral of the Fleet Sir DUDLEY POUND, First Sea Lord and Chief of Naval Staff.
Air Chief Marshal Sir CHARLES PORTAL, Chief of the Air Staff (Items 1-5).

The following were also present:
The Right Hon. HERBERT MORRISON, M.P., Secretary of State for the Home Department and Minister of Home Security.
The Right Hon. LORD LLOYD, Secretary of State for the Colonies (Item 5).
The Right Hon. SIR ARCHIBALD SINCLAIR, Bt., M.P., Secretary of State for Air.
Lieut.-Colonel The Right Hon. J. T. C. MOORE-BRABAZON, M.P., Minister of Transport (Items 6-8).
The Right Hon. A. DUFF COOPER, M.P., Minister of Information.
General Sir JOHN DILL, Chief of the Imperial General Staff.

Secretariat:
Sir EDMUND BARTLETT.
Major-General Sir HASTINGS ISMAY.
Mr. W. D. WILKINSON.
Mr. L. F. BURGIS.

[21554—2]
### WAR CABINET 277 (40).

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The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs said that in the early hours of that morning a telegram had been received (No. 906) from Sir Samuel Hoare at Madrid. The French Ambassador had told him that the Prime Minister's message was likely to have a great effect on the French Council of Ministers. M. Laval and Admiral Darlan were pressing hard for agreement with the Germans over the transfer of the French Fleet and French bases to Germany, whilst Marshal Pétain and General Weygand were resisting. He (the French Ambassador) believed that, if either the King or the Prime Minister could send a message through him to Marshal Pétain, such a message might turn the scales in our favour. The telegram went on to suggest the terms of a suitable message.

A further telegram had followed (No. 908) asking for authority to tell the French Ambassador in Madrid that such a message would be sent.

The Foreign Secretary, continuing, said that the Prime Minister and himself had drafted an appeal to Marshal Pétain to be sent to him from the King. This telegram (see Appendix) was now being despatched to Sir Samuel Hoare for communication to the French Ambassador.

The Prime Minister said that he hoped the War Cabinet would approve of the action which the Foreign Secretary and himself had taken. On the previous Sunday he had himself sent a personal telegram to President Roosevelt in regard to the danger of the French handing over to Germany their fleet and bases, and had suggested that he might take action to deter the French from carrying out this proposal. (See Minute 7 below.)

Copies of the telegrams received from Sir Samuel Hoare and of the message from the King to Marshal Pétain were being sent to Washington in order that the President might be kept au courant with events. He was also telegraphing to Washington suggesting that the President should himself send a personal message to Marshal Pétain to the effect that the United States would view with grave concern the handing over of French bases to Germany.

The Prime Minister added that he and the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs had considered making a personal appeal to General Weygand, but on reflection had thought that for the moment it would be sufficient if he was kept informed of what was happening through our Consul-General at Tangier, to whom copies of the relevant telegrams were being sent for communication to the General.

The Prime Minister said that, if the French Fleet and Naval bases were transferred to Germany, our navy would be faced with the most serious problems, and the situation would be an anxious one.

The War Cabinet—

(a) Approved of the action recorded above which had been taken by the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.

(b) Invited the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs to acquaint the Dominion Prime Ministers with the situation.
2. The Prime Minister welcomed Air-Marshal Portal on his appointment as Chief of the Air Staff.

The Chief of the Air Staff reported that on the previous night 170 enemy bombers had flown over this country, but only 50 had attacked London. Birmingham had been heavily attacked. On the previous night one of our Beaufighters had intercepted an enemy machine, and had fired at it with its cannon. No result had been obtained, though it was thought that the enemy had been hit.

On the previous night one of our bombers had been shot down in flames by enemy aircraft when taking off from its aerodrome.

On the previous night 128 of our aircraft had been despatched to attack the Channel Ports, oil targets, aluminium targets, communications in the Ruhr, and 20 to attack a target in the Berlin area. Although full reports had not yet been received it was thought that these attacks had been successful.

The Secretary of State for the Home Department and Minister of Home Security said that, although little military damage had been done in Birmingham on the previous night, considerable damage had been done in the centre of the town. The two railway stations had been hit and also the Town Hall and Midland Hotel. Damage in the London area had been negligible. So far as had been reported the civilian casualties for the previous night had been 2 killed and 67 injured in the London area, and 8 killed and 46 injured in the Provinces.

The Chief of Naval Staff reported that it was now known that three more ships in the slow convoy which had been attacked over the week-end had been sunk. Out of thirty-five ships in this slow convoy fifteen had been sunk and five damaged.

It was hoped that the increased number of destroyers which it had been decided should be used for escort duties would be operating by the 15th November.

The First Lord of the Admiralty said that one disturbing feature in the week-end attack was an unconfirmed report that one of the Swedish ships had shown a red light.

The fourth group of United States destroyers was now on its way across the Atlantic, and would probably be put straight into service.

The Chief of the Imperial General Staff made the following report:

A battalion with supporting artillery had raided an enemy camp 14 miles east of Sidi Barrani on the 22nd/23rd October and had destroyed eight M.T. with Molotov bombs. Our casualties had been three killed and four wounded. Enemy casualties were unknown, but one prisoner had been captured.

A patrol of the Sudan Defence Force had surprised 1,000 enemy and had attacked them in the rear from 100 yards. Enemy casualties had been heavy. We had suffered no losses. In the Blue Nile sector no enemy advance had been reported north of the line Maganza to Jebel Gardada.

Two enemy aircraft had raided Port Sudan on the 23rd October and dropped bombs near the quay. No material damage had been done, but ten natives had been killed and about twenty injured.

The second convoy of the South African Brigade (3,000 personnel) had arrived at Mombasa on the 21st October.
No confirmation had been received of the rumours of an impending Italian attack on Greece. It seemed possible that the Italians thought that the visit of the Secretary of State for War to Egypt was connected with a coming offensive on our part.

The War Cabinet took note of the above statements.

3. The War Cabinet had before them a Memorandum by the First Lord of the Admiralty (W.P. (40) 349) making proposals for additional new naval construction and for an early resumption of work on ships on which work had been suspended.

In regard to the main types of ships, his proposals were as follows:

**Battleships.**

Work should be pushed ahead on the *Hmsc* and *Vanguard*. *Lion* and *Teméraire* (both of which had been laid down) should be proceeded with as men and material could be made available. *Conqueror* and *Thunderer* should not be laid down at once, but should be started as soon as practicable.

**Aircraft-carriers.**

Work on the *Indefatigable* should be resumed and one additional vessel considered early in 1941.

**Cruisers.**

Work should proceed on the 8 suspended cruisers and 4 of a new type laid down in March 1941.

**Destroyers.**

Work should proceed on the 4th Emergency Flotilla and two additional flotillas should be ordered in December 1940 and March 1941 respectively.

In addition, 14 sloops, 30 corvettes and 38 submarines, and a large number of miscellaneous craft, should be laid down.

The following points were made in discussion:

1. The Chancellor of the Exchequer asked whether the First Lord’s programme would interfere with merchant ship building. The First Lord of the Admiralty said that capacity for merchant ship building, at the rate of 1,250,000 tons a year, would not be interfered with.

2. Doubt was expressed whether the First Lord’s programme could be carried out without interference with the programmes of the other Services. The Chancellor of the Exchequer said that, while the need for small ships could not be contested, different arguments applied to capital ships, which could not be completed until 1943, 1944 or 1945.

3. It was argued that, if these capital ships were being built to meet the contingency of a war with Japan in 1943 or 1944, we could fairly assume that the United States Navy would then be on our side.

4. The Prime Minister referred to his recent paper on Priorities (W.P. (40) 410), and thought that very powerful arguments had been advanced by the First Lord in favour of proceeding with all the suspended ships. At the end of the war we should be faced with the formidable task of clearing up the situation in the Far East, and we
should be unequal to that task if we fell behind Japan in capital ship construction. It took four years or more to build a capital ship, and he thought it was essential to make progress towards the completion of a number of these powerful vessels. The potentialities of capital ships for altering a military situation were very great indeed.

(5) The Prime Minister said he had reached the conclusion that work must be resumed on the capital ships to which the First Lord had referred, on the understanding that further delays might be imposed by shortages of steel or other necessary materials. In that event, the Admiralty would have to advance their completion dates.

(6) The Minister of Aircraft Production referred to the possible competition between the programme of his Department and the First Lord's programme.

In discussion it was pointed out that the programme would make relatively small demands for alloy steel or aluminium. It was clear that the Admiralty would have to economise in regard to the latter. As regards machine tools, the programme would be kept under constant review, in consultation with the other production Departments.

(7) The Chief of the Imperial General Staff said that he was about to consult the Admiralty regarding the number of landing craft included in the programme. Prima facie, the provision proposed was inadequate to meet Army requirements.

The War Cabinet—

Gave general approval to the proposals in W.P. (40) 349, subject to:

(a) The normal consultations taking place between the Treasury and the Admiralty at various stages in the programme.

(b) The general understanding that further delays might be imposed by shortages of steel and other necessary materials, in which event the completion dates would have to be advanced.

4. In connection with the previous Minute, the Prime Minister drew attention to the very heavy demands being made by the Army for wheeled vehicles. The scale of these demands was based on the operations of a division under mobile conditions. In addition, however, substantial margins were allowed for various contingencies, and the full scale was applied to training units and to forces allocated to fixed defence positions. In the result, the total demand was far beyond real requirements.

The Chief of the Imperial General Staff said that the War Office appreciated that the Tank programme would suffer if the production of wheeled vehicles was not kept within bounds. The matter was under examination by a War Office Committee.

The Prime Minister suggested that a Treasury representative should be added to this Committee. The use of horse transport should also be examined.

The Minister of Labour and National Service suggested that Army lorries should be lent to relieve transport congestion at the docks. Army interests could be safeguarded by lending lorries only to reputable firms with good repair depots.
The Chief of the Imperial General Staff said that the divisions now in this country were by no means well equipped with transport. In view of the invasion risk, ammunition lorries could not be released. The War Office would, however, examine whether a number of supply lorries could be lent to civil industry.

The War Cabinet took note that the War Office would examine the Minister of Labour’s suggestion.

5. The War Cabinet had before them a Memorandum by the Secretary of State for the Colonies and the Minister of Health (W.P. (G) (40) 273) as to some 10,600 Gibraltarians who had been compulsorily evacuated from Gibraltar and were temporarily accommodated in London. Arrangements had been made to accommodate them in the West Indies, but since the loss of the City of Benares, and the decision not to proceed with the Children’s Overseas Reception Scheme, they had been in a difficult mood. Some 500 of these evacuees were now prepared to go overseas voluntarily, but compulsion might be necessary to get the whole party to go.

The First Lord of the Admiralty said that if the party of 500 referred to in W.P. (G) (40) 273 was the only one concerned, the Navy could provide a sufficient escort. He considered, however, that, with the present position in the North Western Approaches, no further sailings of this kind should be arranged until the Admiralty had tested the results of the new convoy arrangements about to be put into force on trial. He asked that no arrangement for any further shipments should be made without personal consultation with him.

The Minister of Health said that there was no question of the whole party proceeding overseas at once, but they would go in relays.

The Prime Minister thought that the Gibraltarians ought to go overseas and that they should be made to understand that we were determined that they should go. Their attitude could be altered by propaganda.

In reply to a question by the Minister of Labour, the Colonial Secretary admitted that the conditions on the ships in which the evacuees had been brought here from Morocco had been bad. This was because it had been necessary to use the cargo-liners used to repatriate French troops from this country.

The Minister of Shipping said that good passenger vessels would be used for the voyage to the West Indies.

The War Cabinet—

(a) Invited the Colonial Secretary, the Minister of Health and the Minister of Shipping to make arrangements forthwith for the shipment to the West Indies of the 500 volunteers.

(b) Invited the Colonial Secretary and the Minister of Health to make suitable arrangements to induce the other Gibraltarian evacuees, by effective propaganda, to proceed to the West Indies as and when suitable shipping arrangements could be made. It should be made clear to the Gibraltarians that the Government adhered to their decision that they should proceed overseas.

(c) Invited the Minister of Shipping to keep the First Lord of the Admiralty informed as to the sailing arrangements made and in contemplation for these evacuees, having regard to the First Lord’s responsibilities in regard to escorts.
6. The War Cabinet had before them a Memorandum by the Minister of Home Security on Improved Street Lighting (W.P. (G) (40) 272). The question for immediate decision was whether a Circular should be issued to Local Authorities to ascertain their views on the scheme set out in the Report of the Black-out Committee (W.P. (40) 375), and to invite them to prepare plans for their areas.

The Minister of Home Security said that his impression was that, as the result of the intense night bombing on this country, public opinion was now very sensitive on lighting questions, and that proposals to improve street lighting would not be well received at this juncture. Further, the Local Authority staffs concerned were already hard pressed. The cost was £500,000, and the view hitherto taken had been that, as a local amenity was concerned, the cost should be borne by the Local Authorities. They were unlikely to be willing to bear this cost.

The Prime Minister thought the view that the enemy bombers guided themselves by ground lights was not well founded. The scheme to improve street lighting should not be allowed to fall into such a state of abeyance that it would take a long time to put into effect if conditions eased.

The Secretary of State for Air said that the Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Fighter Command, held that, in present circumstances, it would be impracticable to operate a system of improved street lighting in Southern England.

The War Cabinet:—

(1) Agreed that a Circular should not be issued to Local Authorities, but that their opinion on this matter should be ascertained by the Minister of Home Security by personal consultation;
(2) Agreed that this matter should be brought forward again to the War Cabinet at the beginning of December;
(3) Invited the Minister of Home Security to take such steps as were possible to proceed with preparatory measures, without, however, incurring any substantial expenditure on the scheme.

7. The Prime Minister read the terms of a message sent by President Roosevelt to the French Government protesting against any action by the French Government permitting the Germans to use the French Fleet against the British Fleet. This telegram had been sent in response to a suggestion which the Prime Minister had made on the previous Sunday (see Minute 1 above). The President's telegram was expressed in the strongest terms, but it was noted that it related mainly to action which permitted the Germans to use the French Fleet, and did not deal with the use by the enemy of French bases.

The War Cabinet agreed that it would be desirable that this further aspect of the question should be brought to the President's notice.

8. The War Cabinet had before them a Memorandum by the Minister of Home Security (W.P. (G) (40) 271), putting forward proposals to reduce the number of persons travelling to and from the centre of London without disturbing the national war effort. These proposals had been put forward by the Interdepartmental Committee under the chairmanship of the Minister of Transport, and had been considered and approved by the Civil Defence Executive Sub-Committee.
The main proposals, and the points made thereon in discussion, were as follows:

(1) Evacuation.—It was proposed to encourage certain classes of business to leave London, without prejudice to the needs of the homeless and of mothers and children.

General agreement was expressed with this suggestion provided that publicity was avoided. The matter would be dealt with by unofficial contacts with trade associations and individual firms.

It was explained that 900 firms had made plans to leave London before the war, but had mainly planned to go either to the South-Eastern Counties (which were now difficult for military reasons) or to Oxfordshire, Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Hertfordshire, which had now been largely filled up by unofficial evacuation from London. It was therefore proposed to guide the firms, so far as possible, to the Midlands and the North. This could be done while still leaving room for dispersal from the big centres of population in the Midlands.

(2) Early Closing and avoidance of peak hours.—Arrangements would be made to discuss with the interests concerned the closing of shops at a progressively earlier hour, not later than 3 p.m. at the extreme. The availability of cheap day return tickets would be curtailed.

(3) Sleeping at places of business.—Firms with suitable protected accommodation would be asked to allow a proportion of their staff to sleep on the premises.

(4) Alteration of holidays and (5) Adjustment of hours.—It was proposed to discuss with employers and with the T.U.C. proposals for:

(a) different day or half-day holidays for different trades or businesses;
(b) a five-day week, spread over six days, or a six-day week with shorter hours on each day;
(c) an adjustment of hours to enable staff to leave early.

In regard to (2) to (5) generally, the Minister of Aircraft Production feared that proposals that shops should close at 3 p.m., or for a five-day week, if put forward by the Government, would react on hours of work in factories. [Earlier in the summer, the grant to Civil Servants of a fortnight's holiday had reacted on the factories.] He cited in support of this view a suggestion made in the course of the Meeting by the Minister of Labour and National Service that provision should be made for a number of munitions workers to sleep at their factories, in order to increase the amount of night work.

The view generally expressed in discussion was that it was impossible to lay down uniform rules applicable to all classes of the community, and that different conditions applied to Civil Servants and persons working in shops than to munition workers. Further, it was suggested that the earlier closing of shops could be linked up with the curtailment of hours during which cheap day return tickets were available, as a policy designed to keep the transport facilities at the peak hours open for munitions workers and other persons engaged in essential war work.

This view met with the general approval of the War Cabinet.

(6) Summer-time.—This should be continued during the winter.

(7) Transport Services.—Various proposals were being made to improve facilities.

The Minister of Labour and National Service said that the need for express buses was not limited to London, but existed also in other towns, notably Bristol.

The Minister of Transport undertook to look into this point.
(8) **Private car drivers** would be asked to carry as many passengers as possible.

The War Cabinet:—

Gave general approval to the recommendations in the Report outlined above, subject to the points referred to at "X" and "Y."

*Richmond Terrace, S.W. 1,*  
*October 25, 1940.*

**APPENDIX.**

*Cypher Telegram to Sir S. Hoare (Madrid).*

(No. 935. Most Immediate.)  
*Foreign Office, October 25, 1940, 1.20 P.M.*

MY telegram No. 933 [of 25th October: Message for Marshal Petain].

Please convey to your French colleague following message from His Majesty The King to Marshal Petain:

"M. le Marechal,

At this serious juncture in the life of the British and French peoples, I send you a message of goodwill. The armistice which you were forced to make with the common enemy and his occupation of so many French ports and aerodromes for the attack on my country have been a very grievous addition to the burdens which my people have to bear. Nevertheless, these tragic events have not weakened in British hearts the sympathy and sense of comradeship which have grown up over many years of peace and war between the British and French nations. We are resolved to fight on to the end, and we are sure that the end will be a complete British victory over Hitler and his régime. We have solemnly declared that our victory will carry with it the restoration of the freedom and greatness of France.

Reports are reaching me of an attempt by the German Government to secure from you undertakings that would go far beyond the terms accepted by you at the time of the armistice. I recall that then you expressed your determination to accept no terms dishonouring to the name of France. I am confident that now also you will reject proposals that would bring dishonour to France and grave damage to a late ally. The disaster that overwhelmed France deprived us of her assistance but it would indeed be a sombre event in history if France were to range herself against us and afford direct assistance to our enemy. I do not doubt that, in refusing any such proposals that may have been made, you will carry with you the overwhelming assent of all those among both our peoples, and in other countries, who have put their faith in your honour as a soldier and who see in a British victory their hope of the salvation of France."

(Repeated to Washington, No. 2791.)
DEPARTMENTAL (SECRET).


24th October, 1940.

D. 10.50 p.m. 24th October, 1940.
R. 2.30 a.m. 25th October, 1940.

No. 908.

MOST IMMEDIATE.

Following for Prime Minister.

My telegram No. 906.

SECRET.

Please authorise me immediately to tell the French Ambassador who has visited me urgently again, that the King or you are sending a further message to Pétain. This announcement may enable the Ambassador to hold up negotiations in Paris and forestall Laval. A message from the King to Pétain would carry immense weight.

As negotiations will be resumed in Paris tomorrow, please let me have answer by mid-day. The full message can arrive later.

[Sent to Private Secretary, No. 10 Downing Street, at 3.45 a.m.]
24th October, 1940.

D. 10.30 p.m. 24th October, 1940.
R. 2.20 a.m. 25th October, 1940.

No. 906.

MOST IMMEDIATE.

MOST SECRET.

Following for the Prime Minister.

French Ambassador told me this evening that the Prime Minister's message (see my telegram No. 900) is likely to have great effect on French Council of Ministers. M. Laval and Darlan are pressing hard for agreement with the Germans over transfer of fleet and bases, whilst Petain and Weygand are resisting.

Ambassador believes that if the Prime Minister could immediately send me a similar message, expressed in solemn and friendly words that could be transmitted verbatim to the Marshal himself, it might turn the scales in our favour. Such a message should take into account, and if possible mention, Petain's loyalty to his signature binding him to the terms of the Armistice. It should therefore be made clear that German demands go far beyond the Armistice terms.

Message should end with personal appeal to Petain to respond to your unselfish offer, and to make clear to the world the French determination to repudiate dishonourable terms. Ambassador believes, not only would such a message strengthen Petain's hands, but also prove a damning document against M. Laval if it was decided to publish it.

Ambassador has with great deference suggested, in order to give message greatest possible solemnity, it might be sent to Petain in the name of the King.

[Sent to Private Secretary, No. 10, Downing Street, at 3.45 a.m.]
OUTWARD TELEGRAM

To THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,

Cypher telegram to Mr. Butler (Washington).

Foreign Office. 25th October, 1940. 12.10 p.m.

No. 2789

MOST IMMEDIATE.

Please convey following message from Prime Minister to President immediately.

(Begins): Our Ambassador will have told you about the telegrams we have received from and sent to Sir Samuel Hoare in Madrid, and the views of the French Ambassador there. There seems to be a desperate struggle going on between Pétain and Laval. If the French Fleet and French bases on the African shore are betrayed to Germany, our task will become vastly more difficult, and your dangers will grow. I have the feeling things are hanging in the balance at Vichy. The King is sending a personal message to Marshal Pétain, appealing to his soldierly honour. Would it not be possible for you, Mr. President, to send a message to him yourself? It would greatly strengthen his position and might make him choose rightly. Anyhow there is no time to be lost as a very disastrous turn may be very easily be given to the war by the Vichy Government committing another act of shame. (Ends).