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SECRECY OF CABINET PROCEEDINGS

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It is the established rule that proceedings of the Cabinet are secret. It is the personal responsibility of Cabinet Ministers to see that there is no leakage of information about discussions in the Cabinet. Their collective responsibility for the decisions of the Cabinet imposes this need for discretion upon them and they are bound also by the Privy Councillor's oath.

Precautions against unauthorised disclosures of information are noted in paragraphs 33-38 of C.P. (49)95.

For earlier notes on the need for secrecy see File 4/1/6A.

For general discussion of the secrecy of Cabinet proceedings see Jennings, pp. 208-210.

The relevant passage of the Privy Councillor's oath is:-

"You shall, in all things to be moved, treated, and debated in Council, faithfully and truly declare your Mind and Opinion according to your Heart and Conscience and shall keep secret all Matters revealed unto you or that shall be treated of secretly in Council. And if any of the said Treaties or Councils shall touch any of the Counsellors, you shall not reveal it unto him, but will keep the same until such time as, by the Consent of His Majesty, or of the Council, Publication shall be made thereof."

On the procedure for tracing leakages of information see generally File S50/10/15.

On the King's consent to disclosure of Cabinet proceedings in statements by resigning Ministers, see Part II.

On the security of Cabinet Documents and restrictions on their circulation see Part V.

The records of Cabinet proceedings include many references to leakage of information and many injunctions to Ministers on the importance of preserving secrecy, particularly in the handling of Cabinet conclusions. Thus in March, 1922 the Cabinet decided, because of frequent leakages, that only two full copies of Cabinet conclusions should be made. Later in 1922 (Cab. 68(22)9) the Cabinet discussed a memorandum by Lord Stanfordham on instances of unauthorised public references to proceedings in Cabinet: it was made clear that the King's permission was necessary before such disclosures were made (Cab. 68(22)9, and original memorandum there filed).