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SECRET.

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WAR CABINET, 45.

Minutes of a Meeting of the War Cabinet held at 10, Downing Street, S.W., on Thursday, January 25, 1917, at 3.30 P.M.

Present :

The PRIME MINISTER (*in the Chair*).

The Right Hon. the EARL CURZON OF KEDLESTON, K.G., G.C.S.I., G.C.I.E. | The Right Hon. A. BONAR LAW, M.P.

Lieutenant-Colonel SIR M. P. A. HANKEY, K.C.B., *Secretary*.

Mr. G. M. YOUNG, *Assistant Secretary*.

Mr. THOMAS JONES, *Assistant Secretary*.

Captain CLEMENT JONES, *Assistant Secretary*.

Man-Power.

Agriculture.

Attended in connection with Minutes 1, 2, and 3 :

Mr. A. Chamberlain, S. of S. for India.

Mr. W. Long, S. of S. for the Colonies.

Mr. Prothero, President of the Board of Agriculture.

Mr. N. Chamberlain, Director-General of National Service.

Mr. Stevenson, National Service.

Expenditure.

Board of Agriculture.

1. WITH reference to the decision of the War Cabinet, 42, Minute 6, that the Director of National Service should take powers to remove men from gardening and similar occupations and supply them to agriculture, the War Cabinet decided that it was unnecessary for any steps to be taken until the Director issued his general appeal for volunteers, in which special emphasis would be laid on the need for volunteers for agriculture.

2. The Director having reported that he expected to be in a position to issue his general appeal in the course of the following week, the War Cabinet decided that:—

The Treasury should be authorised to sanction without delay his proposals for expenditure, organisation, and publicity.

3. The War Cabinet authorised the President of the Board of Agriculture to take all necessary steps for providing his Department with a staff adequate to meet the emergency with which it has been called upon to deal.

Egypt and Soudan
Food Production.
Attended in connection with Minute 4:
Mr. Villiers, Foreign Office.

4. The War Cabinet discussed the possibility of producing larger quantities of cereals in Egypt and the Soudan, with a view to reducing their dependence on imported supplies (Appendix I), and decided that:—

The Foreign Office should continue to impress on the High Commissioner and the Sirdar the importance of increasing the area under foodstuffs at the earliest opportunity.

Food Control.
Sugar.
Attended in connection with Minute 5:
Lord Rhondda, President of the Local Government Board.
Lord Devonport, Food Controller.

5. With reference to War Cabinet, 42, Minute 2, the Food Controller submitted figures showing that the consumption of sugar was being steadily reduced, and during the past three weeks had been lower than that estimated on the basis of a 12-oz. ration (Appendix II).

The War Cabinet decided not to proceed with the rationing of sugar at present.

Merchant Shipbuilding.
Attended in connection with Minutes 6, 7, and 8:
Sir J. Maclay, Controller of Shipping.

6. The Shipping Controller submitted certain proposals in connection with merchant shipbuilding, especially in regard to the system of payment by results (War Cabinet, 40, Minute 17 (b)).

The War Cabinet asked the Shipping Controller to embody his suggestions in a Memorandum to be circulated to members of the War Cabinet, and also to the Minister of Labour and the Minister of Pensions.

The Shipping Controller was also asked to show in his Memorandum the amount of extra wages estimated as likely to be obtained from the system of payment by results.

Shipbuilding Abroad.

7. With reference to the building of merchant vessels on behalf of the Government, both in the Dominions and abroad (War Cabinet, 40, Minute 17 (c)), the Shipping Controller reported that Mr. Isherwood is proceeding shortly to the United States of America, and Mr. Esplen possibly to Japan, in order to investigate the shipbuilding possibilities in those countries.

It was possible that up to forty steamers, of from about 6,000 to 12,500 tons, might be obtained during 1917 in the United States of America.

The total cost of these steamers was estimated at about 12,500,000*l.*

The War Cabinet authorised the Shipping Controller to purchase and to place orders for the building of these vessels, if obtainable, up to the figure indicated, and also to negotiate and arrange for the construction and purchase of vessels in Japan.

British Columbia Model.

8. The Shipping Controller's attention was drawn to a type of vessel known as the British Columbia Model, which, it is understood, is constructed of wood. The Shipping Controller undertook to investigate the possibility of building and using this type of ship.

(Initialled) D. Ll. G.

2, Whitehall Gardens, S.W.,
January 25, 1917.

APPENDIX I.

FOOD SUPPLIES.—EGYPT AND THE SOUDAN.

*Note by the Foreign Office.**Minute I.*

Mr. L. Oliphant,

THE Prime Minister has been enquiring whether any steps have been or are being taken to accumulate supplies of wheat and other foodstuffs in Egypt.

The D.M.I., War Office, has no information on the subject. Has the Foreign Office, please?

(Signed) L. STORR.

January 22, 1917.

Minute II.

Major Storr,

The question of accumulating stocks of wheat and foodstuffs in Egypt has not been raised, but the Foreign Office telegraphed to Cairo and Khartoum early in December last to instruct Sir H. McMahon and Sir R. Wingate to make thorough enquiries into the possibility of increasing the area sown with wheat and other foodstuffs in Egypt and the Soudan respectively.

The reply received from Cairo was to the effect that the winter crops were already planted, and it was impossible to change them, though the area sown with millet and maize might perhaps be increased in Upper Egypt; and Sir H. McMahon also pointed out that Egypt did not normally sow enough wheat for her own consumption. At the instance of the Board of Agriculture, we have since called the attention of the Egyptian Government to the importance of increasing the production of durra as much as possible.

The enquiries as regards the Soudan are not yet complete, but it is hoped that the area planted with wheat can be increased by about 10,000 acres this season, and much more can be sown next season if means for extra artificial irrigation can be provided. This question is being carefully considered.

(Initialled) D.

January 22, 1917.

APPENDIX II.

SUGAR.

Note by the Food Controller.

On the basis of 12 oz. per head per week, tonnage requirements would be	1,209,900
On the basis of 8 oz. per head per week, tonnage requirements would be	960,347
From July to December 1916 distribution was at annual rate of	1,389,640 tons.
During 12 weeks October 30, 1916, to January 20, 1917, at annual rate of	1,268,621 "
During 3 weeks January 1 to January 20, 1917, at annual rate of	1,179,739 "

The figures suggest that consumption is being steadily reduced, and during the past three weeks has been lower than that estimated on the basis of a 12-oz. ration.

