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SECRET.

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WAR CABINET 626.

Conclusions of a Meeting of the War Cabinet held at 10, Downing Street, S.W.,
on Friday, September 26, 1919, at 4.30 P.M.

Present :

The PRIME MINISTER (*in the Chair*).

The Right Hon. A. BONAR LAW, M.P.	The Right Hon. G. N. BARNES, M.P.
The Right Hon. The Earl CURZON OF KEDLESTON, K.G., G.C.S.I., G.C.I.E.	The Right Hon. Sir E. GEDDES, G.C.B., G.B.E., M.P.
The Right Hon. A. CHAMBERLAIN, M.P.	

The following were also present :

The Right Hon. W. LONG, M.P., First Lord of the Admiralty (for Minutes 1-7).	The Right Hon. Sir A. C. GEDDES, K.C.B., M.P., President of the Board of Trade (for Minutes 1-7).
The Right Hon. W. S. CHURCHILL, M.P., Secretary of State for War (for Minutes 1-7).	The Right Hon. E. S. SHORTT, K.C., M.P., Secretary of State for Home Affairs (for Minutes 1-7).
Field-Marshal Earl HAIG, K.T., G.C.B., O.M., G.C.V.O., K.C.I.E., Commander- in-Chief, Home Forces (for Minutes 1-7).	The Right Hon. the Lord INVERFORTH, Minister of Munitions (for Minutes 1-7).
Major-General Sir C. H. HARRINGTON, K.C.B., D.S.O., Deputy Chief of the Imperial General Staff (for Minutes 1-7).	Sir W. F. MARWOOD, K.C.B., Joint Secre- tary, Board of Trade (for Minutes 1-7).
Lieut.-General Sir G. M. W. MACDONAGH, K.C.M.G., C.B., Adjutant-General to the Forces (for Minutes 1-7).	Lieut.-Colonel Sir RHYS WILLIAMS, K.C., D.S.O., M.P., Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Transport (Minutes 1-7).
Lieut.-General Sir TRAVERS-CLARKE, K.C.M.G., C.B., Quartermaster-General to the Forces (for Minutes 1-7).	Sir R. F. DUNNELL, K.C.B., Secretary, Ministry of Transport (for Minutes 1-7).
Brigadier-General R. J. ROSS, C.B., C.M.G., General Headquarters, Home Forces (for Minutes 1-7).	Sir PERCY BATES, Bart., Ministry of Shipping (for Minutes 1-7).
The Right Hon. Sir R. S. HORNE, K.B.E., K.C., M.P., Minister of Labour.	Captain C. E. PENNY, Ministry of Food (for Minutes 1-7).
Sir D. J. SHACKLETON, K.C.B., Secretary, Ministry of Labour (for Minutes 1-7).	Sir HERBERT WALKER, K.C.B., Chairman, Railway Executive Committee (for Minutes 1-7).
The Right Hon. G. H. ROBERTS, M.P., Food Controller (for Minutes 1-7).	Mr. T. LODGE, Ministry of Shipping (for Minutes 1-7).

Lieutenant-Colonel Sir M. P. A. HANKEY, G.C.B., *Secretary*.

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

Lieutenant-Colonel L. STORR, C.B., *Assistant Secretary*.

The Strike.

1. The Prime Minister gave the War Cabinet an account of the negotiations with the National Union of Railwaymen, which had resulted in a breakdown, with the consequence that a railway strike on an unprecedented scale would commence at midnight. The War Cabinet then proceeded to consider the measures necessary to cope with the situation.

General Direction of the Government Measures.

2. The War Cabinet decided :—

That a special Cabinet Committee, composed as follows :—

The Minister of Transport (*in the Chair*),
 The Secretary of State for Home Affairs,
 The President of the Board of Trade,
 The Minister of Food,
 The First Lord of the Admiralty,
 The Secretary of State for War (with representatives of the General Staff and Home Forces as required),
 The Minister of Shipping (or his representative),
 The Minister of Labour,
 Lieutenant-Colonel L. Storr } *Secretaries*,
 Mr. G. M. Evans

should be set up at once to take charge of the Government's arrangements for meeting the strike.

Strike Funds.

3. The question of placing an embargo on the strike funds was remitted to the Cabinet Committee.

Food Stocks and Distribution.

4. The Minister of Food stated that the stocks of the principal foods in dealers' hands amounted to from two to four weeks' supply. He gave an outline of the arrangements that had been made for the distribution of food, more particularly milk, margarine, and yeast.

The general question of stocks and distribution of food was remitted to the Cabinet Committee.

5. The First Lord of the Admiralty stated that his Department was studying the practicability of using naval craft on the canals for purposes of food distribution.

Unemployment Pay.

6. The War Cabinet briefly considered the question of the issue of unemployment pay during the strike. The Minister of Labour undertook to go at once into the question and to make recommendations.

Maintenance of Order.

7. The only place where some doubt was expressed as to the maintenance of order was Liverpool, where the police force is below strength, and contains many newly enlisted men.

The First Lord of the Admiralty stated that he was informed that the presence of the destroyer in the Mersey had had a considerable moral effect in Liverpool. He undertook to examine the feasibility of keeping a larger warship on the river for such time as might be necessary.

The Field-Marshal commanding the Home Forces reported that he had plenty of troops in this country, but their mobility had been diminished by a recent decision of the War Cabinet that military transport should be released for sale in the open market.

The Quartermaster-General reported that large numbers of motor lorries were still in France, and that instructions had been

issued to bring over as many of these as possible by means of the train ferries.

The question of maintenance of order was remitted to the Cabinet Committee for consideration.

Export of Coal.

8. The President of the Board of Trade reported that he had at once issued orders to stop all export of coal and to retain all coal now at the ports for bunker purposes.

Statement for the Press.

9. After the withdrawal of the members of the new Cabinet Committee for the purpose of holding an immediate meeting, the War Cabinet conferred with the Ministry of Labour as to the terms of an announcement to the press which Sir Robert Horne had drafted for their consideration.

There was considerable discussion as to the form which the announcement should take.

Sir Robert Horne's draft was prepared in the form of a press interview with the Minister of Labour, in which the whole of the Government case was stated at some length.

The suggestion was made that, in addition to the interview, a shorter statement should be published, giving a brief summary of the points at issue and drawing attention to the dastardly nature of this sudden strike, not against persons who were notoriously making excessive profits, but against the Government, which was actually losing money on the maintenance of the railways.

The War Cabinet decided that—

- (1.) Subject to certain amendments, the statement for the public press in the form of an interview with the Minister of Labour should be published and that Sir Robert Horne should give it the widest possible publicity.
- (2.) On the following day the Prime Minister should send a short and crisp telegram, to be read at the public meeting in Wales which he had not been able to attend, drawing attention to the character of the present strike and to the fact that the railwaymen had placed the nation in this very serious predicament after the Government had offered to give consideration to the case of any grade of railwaymen for which it could be shown that hardships or anomalies of any kind were imposed by the new standard rates.

2, Whitehall Gardens, S.W. 1,
September 25, 1919.

