**WAR CABINET, 104.**

Minutes of a Meeting of the War Cabinet held at 10, Downing Street, S.W., on Monday, March 26, 1917, at 11:30 A.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. the Viscount Milner, G.C.B., G.C.M.G.

The following were also present:

- The Right Hon. the Earl of Derby, K.G., G.C.V.O., C.B., Secretary of State for War.
- Major-General F. B. Maugham, C.B., Director of Military Operations (for Minutes 1 to 20).
- Major-General F. C. Shaw, C.B., Chief of General Staff, Home Forces (for Minutes 14 and 15).
- The Right Hon. C. Addison, M.D., M.P., Minister of Munitions (for Minutes 15 to 20).
- The Right Hon. John Hodge, M.P., Minister for Labour (for Minute 23).
- Professor W. G. Adams (for Minutes 21 and 22).
- Major David Davies, M.P. (for Minutes 16 to 20).
- The Right Hon. Sir E. Carson, K.C., M.P., First Lord of the Admiralty (for Minutes 1 to 15).


- The Right Hon. Sir J. Maclay, Bart., Shipping Controller (for Minutes 16 to 20).
- Sir W. Guy Granet, Deputy-Director of Military Railways (for Minutes 16 to 20).
- Mr. Guy Calthrop, Board of Trade (for Minutes 16 to 20).
- The Right Hon. Sir A. H. Stanley, M.P., President of the Board of Trade (for Minutes 16 to 20).
- The Right Hon. the Lord Devonport, Food Controller (for Minutes 21 and 22).
- Sir R. H. Rew, K.C.B., Permanent Secretary to the Food Controller (for Minutes 21 and 22).
- The Right Hon. R. Munro, K.C., M.P., Secretary for Scotland (for Minutes 21 and 22).
- Sir James M. Dodds, K.C.B., Under-Secretary for Scotland (for Minutes 21 and 22).
- Mr. J. Haeling Turner, Director of Agricultural Section, National Service Department (for Minutes 21 and 22).
- The Right Hon. R. E. Prothero, M.V.O., M.P., President of the Board of Agriculture and Fisheries (for Minutes 21 and 22).
- Mr. A. D. Hall, F.R.S., Board of Agriculture and Fisheries (for Minutes 21 and 22).
- Mr. J. R. Campbell, Assistant Secretary, Department of Agriculture for Ireland (for Minutes 21 and 22).


Colonel E. D. Swinton, C.B., D.S.O., Assistant Secretary.

Fleet Paymaster P. H. Row, R.N., Assistant Secretary.

Captain Clement Jones, Assistant Secretary.

Mr. T. Jones, Assistant Secretary.
1. THE Director of Military Operations reported a slowing down in the advance of the British troops, who had now approximately reached the Hindenburg line. Southwards, however, where the Hindenburg line was further in rear of the original German defensive line, the French continued to make progress. He stated that the Germans might possibly withdraw their front to the northward of Amiens, but there were no immediate indications that this was going to happen. He read a letter from General Headquarters, France, dated 23rd March, describing the situation on the Western Front.

2. The Director of Military Operations reported that General Sir Stanley Maude had reinforced his Dina column, and had sent his cavalry to join it. With a view to combined action, he was endeavouring, by aeroplane and other means, to get into touch with the Russians from Kermanshah, but had not so far, been successful. There were indications that the Turks had withdrawn a division from Salonica, and that its destination was probably the Mosul district.

Telegram No. 251, of the 24th March, from the British Minister at Berne, relative to the withdrawal of further Turkish divisions on the Bulgarian front, was read, the Secretary of State for War stating that similar reports had been received by the War Office.

3. In reference to War Cabinet, 99, Minute 9, the Director of Military Operations reported that our Military Attaché in Petrograd had reported that General Russky had been appointed Commander-in-Chief of the Russian armies, and that the Grand Duke Nicholas had placed his resignation in the hands of the Government.

4. Replying to a question from the Prime Minister as to the veracity or otherwise of the reports emanating from Russia relative to a German concentration on the Riga front, the Director of Military Operations stated that there was no evidence of this, that it was the worst season of the year for such an operation, and that he did not think the rumours were correct. He expressed the opinion that they were being circulated by the Russian Provisional Government with a view to strengthening the moral of the Russian troops during the existing crisis.

Telegram relative to Russia, Nos. 397 and 393 of the 25th March, from the British Ambassador were read by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.

5. Mr. Henderson stated that he had received a communication to the effect that representatives of the French Socialist party, who stood for war & outrance, were, with the authority and consent of the French Committee of Foreign Affairs, shortly arriving in England en route to Petrograd, where they were going on a Mission to the Russian Socialist party, their object being to persuade that party to do all in its power to bring the war to a satisfactory conclusion.

The War Cabinet decided that—

Mr. Henderson should use his influence to secure that a suitably composed British Labour Deputation should accompany the French party with the same object.

6. The Director of Military Operations reported further destruction by the Arabs of the Hedjaz Railway and that our aeroplane flight had been moved from Rabegh to Wej.
Air Raid.

7. The First Sea Lord reported the execution of an air raid upon the Berbecke blast furnaces on the 23rd March, and that all our machines had returned safely.

The Baltic Fleet.

8. The First Sea Lord reported that the Russian men-of-war at Reval were in the hands of Committees of Seamen, and that arrangements had been made, with the permission of the Russian Minister of Marine, for the taking over of the submarine depot ship at Reval.


9. The First Sea Lord reported the sinking of the destroyer "Laforey," as the result of striking a mine.

The War Cabinet discussed with the First Sea Lord the general question of mine-sweeping and the provision of mine-sweepers, in view of the enemy's great activity in mine-laying in the vicinity of the South Coast of Ireland and the English Channel.

Bombardment of Dunkirk.

10. The First Sea Lord reported a slight and ineffective bombardment of Dunkirk on the night of the 25th March.

Enemy Naval Concentration at Zeebrugge.

11. The War Cabinet took note that the enemy had concentrated some thirty destroyers at Zeebrugge. The First Sea Lord pointed out that such a concentration must be for the purpose of covering a landing on the Belgian coast, or raids in the Channel, or to attack the Dutch convoys and their escorts. He stated that we had not at present in those waters sufficient forces to counter such a threat decisively, and reported the dispositions he had made to strengthen our forces in these waters.

Possible Attack by Sea in Rear of Allied Lines.

12. The Director of Military Operations, in reference to War Cabinet, 99, Minute 2, read a communication from the Field-Marshal Commanding the British Expeditionary Force to the effect that General Nivelle did not consider, in view of the intelligence at his disposal, that an attack in rear of the Allied Lines in Flanders was probable in the near future, and that after visiting this region he considered the coast defences, for which the French were responsible, to be adequate.

The First Sea Lord stated that he was not in accord with the view expressed as to the adequacy of the coast defences, and informed the War Cabinet that it would take at least six hours before a British Naval Force could be on the spot to interfere with any attempt at landing, and that even then it would be inferior in strength to the covering force.

Increase of Portuguese Contingent.

13. In reference to War Cabinet, 99, Minute 16, the War Cabinet approved the Report of Lord Derby's Committee (Paper G.T.-210) recommending that, in view of the shipping situation and the reports on the Portuguese Contingent already landed in France, the proposed increase in the Portuguese Contingent to be transported should not be agreed to, and that the Portuguese Government should be approached with a view to the Railway Construction and Labour Battalions already arranged for having priority of shipping.

In view of the sensitiveness of the Portuguese, the War Cabinet invited the Secretary of State for War to word his refusal so as to avoid giving any cause of offence to the Portuguese Government and nation.

The Field-Marshal Commanding-in-Chief the Home Forces, explained that the main line of defence was on the coast, and that, in the event of the enemy reaching the coast, their first task would be to force this line, and that 5 divisions, 2 of which were new divisions in a very backward condition, were distributed as reserves to meet such a contingency. He further stated that, in spite of very carefully worked-out railway arrangements, further reinforcements could not be collected on the East Coast within less than 36-45 hours.

The general view of the experts present at the War Cabinet was that, whilst an attempt at invasion could not be ruled out as absolutely impossible, it was extremely unlikely that the enemy would carry it to a successful conclusion.

Whilst concurring generally in the Joint Committee's Report, the War Cabinet decided that—

In view of the fact that the Committee had not heard the views of Admiral of the Fleet Lord Fisher of Kilverstone, a formal invitation should be sent to Lord Fisher to attend a Meeting of the War Cabinet, to give them the benefit of his views.

The Secretary was instructed to take action accordingly.

In regard to the point raised in the last paragraph of the Joint Committee's Report, as to the advisability of the despatch abroad of the one division at Home which could be sent, the Director of Military Operations stated that the Chief of the Imperial General Staff would bring the subject forward for the decision of the War Cabinet early in April.

15. In reference to letters received by the Prime Minister from Lord Northcliffe and from the Secretary to the Archbishop of Canterbury on the subject of the recent withdrawal of school children from the Isle of Thanet, the Field-Marshal Commanding-in-Chief the Home Forces reported that he had, on the previous Friday, in consequence of information received as to enemy action, ordered a state "Vigilance," which state carried with it the assembling at their War Stations of certain of the Military Forces in Great Britain. He stated that orders had been given that day for the troops to revert to their normal duties.

16. In reference to its previous decision (War Cabinet, 102, Minute 4), the War Cabinet discussed, in the presence of the Railway and Shipping experts, the question of the development of the Overland Route through Italy to Salonica.

Sir Guy Granet stated that the development of the route presented no difficulty from a technical and constructional point of view.

The Secretary of State for War explained, however, that the difficulties arose mainly from the shortage of rolling-stock for the paramount and indispensable needs of the Allied Armies on the Western Front, which had been accentuated by the increased strain produced by following up the recent German withdrawal, and that the supply of this necessary material depended mainly on shipping.

The Shipping Controller said that he expected that considerable assistance might be obtained for the shipping position if America joined the Allies, and that there was always the possibility of neutral shipping (some 250 Dutch, Swedish, Danish, and Norwegian vessels) in British ports being requisitioned, which would be more practicable if the United States entered the war.
The First Sea Lord indicated the hope that some 2,000 trucks, at present employed in the conveyance of coal for the Fleet, might, in the near future, by means of re-organisation of the coaling arrangements, be released.

Sir Guy Granet reported that four goods trains and one passenger train per day would carry overland the same amount of supplies as was being shipped from the United Kingdom to Salonica. He outlined two schemes—one for the transport of 1,200 tons a day and another for the transport of 2,000 tons—explaining that in the former case three months' preparatory work would be required for the provision of sidings, &c, before transport could begin, whilst in the latter case a longer time would be necessary.

The War Cabinet approved the instructions already given by the War Office for the immediate development of the necessary sidings, rest camps, and sheds on the new route, in order that immediate advantage might be taken of the first moment when the necessary rolling-stock could be set free, either from the Western Front or from this country.

In view of the serious outlook for shipping in the Mediterranean, the War Cabinet decided that the War Office, in making their preliminary arrangements, should envisage the largest possible development of this route, with a view to the transportation of supplies to Egypt as well as to Salonica.

The War Cabinet took note that the development of the smaller scheme provides for the conveyance as far as Taranto of an amount equal to all the material now despatched from this country to Salonica, and more.

The Shipping Controller indicated his intention of presenting to the Secretary of State for War at an early date a scheme for night and day work in the ports, involving special labour arrangements, with a view to a more rapid turning round of the ships.

The Minister of Munitions called attention to the amount of railway material awaiting shipping at ports or works, as reported in a Statement submitted by him (Appendix III).

In view of the accumulating evidence that the submarine blockade and the increasing demands made upon tonnage by ourselves and our Allies were exercising a most serious influence on our shipping position, the Shipping Controller was asked again to review the whole situation. The Shipping Controller explained that he had already done this in his Statement on the Mercantile Marine and Shipping Programme, which he had just submitted for the Meeting of the Imperial War Cabinet (Paper G.T.-284).

The question was adjourned for further consideration after discussion at the Imperial War Cabinet.

Having regard to the great stress laid by the Shipping Controller on the importance, from a shipping point of view, of the intervention of the United States of America in the war on the side of the Allies, and also in view of the importance of such intervention from a financial point of view, the War Cabinet decided that—

It was desirable that, in the event of the intervention in the War by the United States of America, a special Mission
21. The War Cabinet had under consideration the Corn Production Bill, which had been drafted to give effect to the decisions which had been reached by it on the 21st February (War Cabinet, 76, Minute 8, 10). The discussion on this subject was adjourned for further study.

22. The War Cabinet had before them the draft of "The Food Hoarding Order, 1917," proposed by the Ministry of Food (War Cabinet, 99, Minute 19) (Paper G.T.-257, Appendix IV). The War Cabinet decided to approve the issue of the Order, subject to the following changes:

Clause 3. Reference to Police to be omitted, and "any person specially authorised by the Food Controller," or words to that effect, to be substituted.

Clause 4 (b.). This clause to be re-drafted so as to exempt persons in the habit of baking their own bread or curing their own bacon, or otherwise conserving foodstuffs in their own homes.

23. The Minister of Labour raised the question of the strike of engineers at Barrow, where the workmen alleged that Messrs. Vickers have been cutting down the time-rates of the premium bonus system. The War Cabinet approved in principle a draft announcement to be made in the House of Commons on the afternoon of the 26th March, and left its exact terms to be arranged by the Prime Minister, Mr. Bonar Law, and Mr. Hodge.

2, Whitehall Gardens, S.W.,
March 26, 1917.

(Initialled) D. L. G.
APPENDIX I.

G.T.-217.

IN circulating this Report of a joint Admiralty and War Office Conference on Invasion, attention is drawn to the fact that the Conference do not appear to have pressed "Lord Fisher to explain fully the grounds on which his apprehensions were based," as suggested by the War Cabinet (War Cabinet, 97 (3)). It is for consideration whether the War Cabinet should not themselves hear what Lord Fisher has to say on the matter.

(Signed) M. P. A. HANKEY.

2, Whitehall Gardens, S.W.,
March 20, 1917.

A Conference was held in the Room of the Secretary of State for War, at 2.45 P.M., on the 16th March, 1917.

Present:
Secretary of State for War.
First Lord of the Admiralty.
First Sea Lord of the Admiralty.
Chief of the Admiralty War Staff.
Chief of the Imperial General Staff.
Director of Military Operations.
Field-Marshal Commanding-in-Chief, Home Forces.
Chief of the General Staff, Home Forces.

1. The Secretary of State for War stated that the conference was held at the request of the War Cabinet, in consequence of a communication on the subject of the invasion of Great Britain which the Prime Minister had received from Admiral of the Fleet Lord Fisher.

2. The First Sea Lord stated that in view of naval developments the Admiralty desired to review the conclusion (ii) of the "Report of a Conference between representatives of the Admiralty War Staff and the General Staff, held to consider the possibility of an attack on the United Kingdom the 9th August, 1916," and to extend the time within which the enemy's landing operations could be effectively interrupted from the original estimate of from twenty-four to twenty-eight hours after the hostile transports were sighted from the shore to from thirty-two to thirty-six hours after the hostile transports had been sighted from the shore.

3. The Admiralty representative stated that the enemy still had sufficient shipping to transport 160,000 men to these shores, and the O.I.G.S. stated that the enemy would still be able to find that number of troops for the purpose of invasion, more especially as he is now increasing the number of his divisions in Belgium.

4. The Admiralty representatives further stated that while invasion was possible they did not consider that, from a naval point of view, it was probable, in view of the grave risks which the enemy must run.

   The First Sea Lord stated that, in his opinion, the probability of a beach landing was remote, as the risks involved were very great, and the C.I.G.S. added that the feasibility of landing a force of 160,000 men within thirty-six hours depended upon the enemy being able to use the beaches.

5. The Field-Marshal Commander-in-Chief, Home Forces, stated that the military aspect of the question was that the defences on the coast were now in a far better condition to meet invasion than they were a year ago, and that in particular the number of machine-guns available at home, which was an important factor in the question, was much greater; on the other hand, the number of mobile troops immediately at the disposal of the Field-Marshal for Home Defence was, as a result of the War Cabinet decision of the 22nd January last, about 60,000 below his estimated requirements to meet an invasion by 160,000 men, and the quality of a considerable portion of his Divisions was poor. There was also the question of Ireland to be considered.
6. The Conference, after hearing the above expression of opinion, decided that the question of the number of troops to be maintained in Great Britain to meet invasion was one of balancing the advantages of strengthening our oversea forces as against the risk of invasion, and could only be decided by the War Cabinet after periodical review of the general situation.

At the present time there is only one Division at Home which could be sent abroad. It is now being prepared and will be ready in about a month's time. The advisability of its despatch should then be considered by the War Cabinet.

(Initialled) E. C.
D.
F.
J. E. J.
W. R. R.

March 17, 1917.

APPENDIX II.

G.T.-247.

Salonika.

Provision of Workmen by M. Venizelos for Road-building Purposes.

Copy of a Letter from M. Gennadius to the Private Secretary to the Prime Minister.

Dear Sir,

14, De Vere Gardens, March 17, 1917.

I HAVE received a telegram in which M. Venizelos desires me to convey to the Prime Minister his warm thanks for the courteous manner in which he was so good as to receive M. Diomedes.

M. Venizelos gave his immediate attention to the Prime Minister’s remarks in regard to workmen for road-building. Although, in consequence of the occupation by the Italians of Northern Epirus and by the French of Koritsa, the road to Monastir is not in territory under the control of the Provisional Government, M. Venizelos offered to General Sarrail to recruit the number of men needed, but the General replied that for the present he was sufficiently supplied with workmen.

M. Venizelos made the same offer to the British Commander-in-Chief, who stated that he needed in his section some 5,000 men. The necessary measures have at once been taken by the Administration under M. Venizelos to supply these workmen.

I request you, in presenting my regards to the Prime Minister, to add that I am at his disposal, should he desire to convey to M. Venizelos any further message.

Yours sincerely,

(Signed) J. Gennadius.

J. T. Davies, Esq.
APPENDIX III.

Ministry of Munitions: Railway Materials Branch.

STATEMENT showing Promised Production compared with Actual Supplies available as at March 10, 1917.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description of Supply</th>
<th>Total Shipped</th>
<th>Total at Ports or Works</th>
<th>Grand Total</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Rails—</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-lb rails</td>
<td>140 Miles</td>
<td>278 Miles</td>
<td>418 Miles</td>
<td>Promise made by Ministry in letter of 5th January to Secretary, War Office</td>
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<tr>
<td>75-lb and 80-lb rails—</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guest Keen</td>
<td>85 Miles</td>
<td>114 Miles</td>
<td>149 Miles</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>68 Miles</td>
<td>48 Miles</td>
<td>116 Miles</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>30 Miles</td>
<td>50 Miles</td>
<td>50 Miles</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada (80-lb.)</td>
<td>107 Miles</td>
<td>117 Miles</td>
<td>117 Miles</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>British railways</td>
<td>114 Miles</td>
<td>200 Miles</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Waggonets</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-ft 8½-in. gauge</td>
<td>7,247 No.</td>
<td>1,222 No.</td>
<td>5,283 No.</td>
<td>Statement by Sir E. W. Moir at meeting at G.H.Q., France, 20/11/15.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-cm gauge</td>
<td>526 No.</td>
<td>336 No.</td>
<td>862 No.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Locomotives—</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-ft 8½-in. gauge</td>
<td>298 No.</td>
<td>109 No.</td>
<td>407 No.</td>
<td>None of these are yet due.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ordered by Ministry</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-ft 8½-in. gauge switch type</td>
<td>10 No.</td>
<td>40 No.</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>Based on contract deliveries.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figures in italics = quantities actually shipped.
Figures in heavy type = quantities awaiting shipment at port or works.

March 20, 1917.

APPENDIX IV.

G.T.—257.

STATUTORY RULES AND ORDERS, 1917, No.

Defence of the Realm.

The Food Hoarding Order, 1917, dated the March, 1917, made by the Food Controller under Regulation 2 F of the Defence of the Realm Regulations.

IN exercise of the powers conferred upon him by Regulation 2 F of the Defence of the Realm Regulations, and of all other powers enabling him in that behalf, the Food Controller hereby orders as follows:—

Supplies for 14 days only to be Held.

1. Except under the authority of the Food Controller, no person shall buy or offer to buy or after the March 1917, have in his possession or under his control any article of food in a greater quantity than is required for ordinary use and consumption in his household or establishment during a period of fourteen days.

In any proceedings for a breach of this Article, the burden of showing what quantity of any article of food is so required shall rest upon the person charged.
Aiding and Abetting.

2. No person shall, as seller or otherwise, knowingly aid or abet the commission of any act forbidden by Article 1 of this Order.

Power of Entry.

3. Any person authorised by the Food Controller and any officer of police may enter upon any premises in which he has reason to believe that any article of food is being kept or secreted in contravention of this Order, and carry out such inspection and examination of the premises as he may think necessary.

Exceptions.

4. This Order shall not apply to—
   (a.) Any article of food required or held in the ordinary course of business by any producer, dealer, or manufacturer.
   (b.) Any home-produced or home-made article of food in the possession of the producer or maker.

(Interpretation.)

5. For the purposes of this Order, the expression "article of food" shall include every article which is used for food by man, or which ordinarily enters into the composition or preparation of human food, except flavouring matters.

Penalty.

6. If any person acts in contravention of this Order, or aids or abets any other person in doing anything in contravention of this Order, that person is guilty of a summary offence against the Defence of the Realm Regulations, and if such person is a company, every director and officer of the company is also guilty of a summary offence against those regulations, unless he proves that the contravention took place without his knowledge or consent.

Title and Commencement of Order.

7.—(a. This Order may be cited as "The Food Hoarding Order, 1917."
(b. This Order shall come into force on the , 1917.

Ministry of Food, March 1917.

Food Controller.