Minutes of a Meeting of the War Cabinet held at 10, Downing Street, S.W., on Friday, April 27, 1917, at 4.30 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.

The Right Hon. A. Henderson, M.P.

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.


Brigadier-General A. C. Geddes, Director of Recruiting.

The Right Hon. C. Addison, M.D., M.P., Minister of Munitions.

Sir Stephenson Kent, K.C.B., Ministry of Munitions.

The Right Hon. Sir A. Stanley, M.P., President of the Board of Trade.

Mr. R. H. Selby, Board of Trade.

Sir H. C. Monro, K.C.B., Permanent Secretary, Local Government Board.

The Right Hon. W. Hayes Fisher, M.P., Parliamentary Secretary of the Local Government Board.

Mr. I. G. Gibbon, Local Government Board.

The Right Hon. Lord Devonport, Food Controller.


Mr. J. F. Beale, Secretary of the Wheat Commission.

Mr. R. B. Gregg, LL.D., Commissioner of the Scottish Board of Agriculture.

Mr. J. R. Campbell, B.Sc., Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction, Ireland.

Mr. D. J. Shackleton, C.B., Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Labour.

Professor Adams.


Mr. T. Jones, Assistant Secretary.

Major Storr, Assistant Secretary.

Mr. G. M. Young, Assistant Secretary.
The Trade Card System and the Schedule of Protected Occupations.

1. THE War Cabinet considered the position which had arisen out of their decision to supersede the Trade Card Scheme by a schedule of occupations and age limits (War Cabinet 103, Minute 2).

The Secretary of State for War explained that, in accordance with this decision and acting on schedules prepared by the Government Departments mainly concerned, orders had been issued by the War Office calling up men under the new system. Yesterday, however, in a Conference with delegates from the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, an undertaking had been given on behalf of the Government that the members of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers would not be called up until further negotiations had taken place. This undertaking could not be carried out because the men had in fact already been called up, some of them being due to report on Monday next. Pledges had also been given previously to other Trade Unions that they would not receive less favourable treatment than the Amalgamated Society of Engineers. A position had thus arisen which threatened seriously to diminish the number of recruits immediately forthcoming.

Mr. Henderson stated that the tone of the Conference had been very menacing. The delegates had demanded that the Trade Card Scheme should be continued, and threats of an immediate stoppage throughout the country had been used. There was undoubtedly grave unrest in the country, which had been deepened by the Russian Revolution, and as Labour Day (the 1st May) was approaching, the situation was one which would need careful handling. It had been made plain to the delegates that the Government would only negotiate on the basis of the schedules, and would not countenance any return to the Trade Card Scheme. A telegram had been received from the Amalgamated Society of Engineers stating that the delegates would consult their constituents on Tuesday morning.

Dr. Addison said he thought that the Executive of the Society and the delegates were not at one on the subject, and he believed that the men would yield if the Government took a firm line; but it would be absolutely necessary to stand by the pledge given at the Conference, and allow the constituencies to be consulted. This view was shared by Mr. Shackleton.

General Geddes explained that the recruiting machine was big and ponderous, and required considerable time and preparation to set it going properly. In response to the decision of the Cabinet on the 22nd March, the machinery had been changed from a geographical to an occupational basis, and would be in full working order by Tuesday next. There were over 200,000 unexpired notices, 70,000 temporary exemptions, and 22,000 substitution cases ready to be dealt with. To stop the machine in the interests of the Engineers would involve other Unions also. The only way it could now be done would be to grant a week's leave to all and have no recruits next week. It would be impossible for such a huge organisation to discriminate between one class of workmen and another, or one workshop and another. This proposal would throw back the training of approximately 120,000 men for a week.

In the course of the discussion which followed it was generally recognised that any action which would stop the flow of recruits at a moment when the Army, already somewhat short of drafts, is engaged in a great offensive was to be deprecated. It was further recognised that to postpone the taking in of recruits who had relinquished their employment would cause considerable hardship and dissatisfaction, and that the men who were treated in this manner would provide a good field for the activities of agitators. Nevertheless, it was agreed that to take any action during the coming week (which includes Labour Day) calculated to increase the resentful temper now prevailing, or to cause a strike which would delay shipbuilding and the output of munitions, would be a still greater
Moreover, it was considered that the postponement for a week would, in the long run, probably produce more recruits.

The War Cabinet decided that:

A Circular should be prepared by a Committee consisting of Mr. Henderson, Dr. Addison, Mr. Shackleton, and General Geddes, with Mr. G. M. Young as Secretary. The Circular should indicate that the War Cabinet was not receding from its decision, had confirmed the undertaking given at yesterday's Conference, and would postpone for one week the recruitment of men who had been called to the Colours so as to permit of the difficulties of inaugurating the scheme being surmounted (Appendix I).

2. The War Cabinet had under consideration a suggestion that the bonus system should be applied to soldiers, in order to stimulate the production of timber (Memorandum by the Secretary of State for War, Paper G.-T. 524, last paragraph). While recognising the possibility of a demand for the extension of the principle to cases other than those indicated by Lord Derby in his Memorandum, the War Cabinet, in view of the urgent need for timber, approved the payment of a bonus as proposed.

3. The War Cabinet had before them a Report by the Interdepartmental Committee appointed to consider economies in the use of grain for horses, and to direct a census of horses (Paper G.-T. 565) (War Cabinet 83, Minute 10), together with a Memorandum by Mr. R. H. Selbie, and covering Notes by the President of the Board of Trade (Papers G.-T. 551 and 559).

The War Cabinet took note of the strong feeling which has been shown in the House of Commons against the continuance of horse-racing. While recognising that the stoppage of horse-racing would not produce any very appreciable reduction in the consumption of grainstuff for human use, they considered that to permit horse-racing to continue would tend to induce a belief in the public mind that the food situation was less serious than had been represented, and to that extent would stultify Lord Devonport's efforts to secure economy in its use.

In view of the serious food situation prevailing in the country, as shown in the reports of the Food Controller and of the Committee above referred to, the War Cabinet requested—

Lord Devonport to communicate to the Jockey Club their decision that after next week horse-racing shall cease throughout the United Kingdom until further notice.

Lord Devonport was also authorised to conclude arrangements with the Jockey Club for the rationing of thoroughbred animals.

Further action in the direction of economising grain for horses as recommended by the Departmental Committee was approved, and the matter was referred to Lord Devonport and Sir A. H. Stanley with authority to take the necessary action to give effect to the recommendation.

4. The Secretary read a communication he had received from the First Sea Lord inviting the attention of the War Cabinet to a case in which a Norwegian ship had been granted permission to carry considerable quantities of foodstuffs, in excess of her own requirements, for the use of South Georgia Island. Although, thanks to the representations of the Senior Naval Officer at Liverpool, the licence had subsequently been cancelled, the First Sea Lord...
asked that, as a matter of principle, the War Cabinet should give an instruction that no exportation of foodstuffs was to be permitted.

The Food Controller reported that he had already taken action with the Board of Customs and Excise to ensure this.

5. The discussion was resumed from the Meeting held on the 30th March, 1917 (War Cabinet 109, Minute 4), when it was decided that the Secretary of State for War should look fully into the matter and report to the War Cabinet.

Lord Derby stated that he had received information from Field-Marshal Sir Douglas Haig to the effect that it had been decided to withdraw all German prisoners, both in the French and British zones of operations in France, employed in the rear of the front lines and in the lines of communication, to a distance of 30 kilometres from the firing line.

The War Cabinet instructed—

The Secretary of State for War to arrange, in concert with Lord Newton, and through the proper diplomatic channels, that the German Government be notified accordingly.

2, Whitehall Gardens, S.W.,
April 28, 1917.
APPENDIX I.

Schedule of Protected Occupations.
(See Minute 1.)

IN consequence of certain unavoidable delays which have arisen in setting up the machinery for the protection of men engaged in vital industries who come under the new Schedule of Protected Occupations, the Government have decided to postpone for one week, with the exception set out below, the recruitment of men who have been called to the Colours and are under orders to report during the week beginning the 30th April.

The Schedule will come into operation on the 7th May (not on the 1st May as set out in the Schedule and explanatory handbills already circulated), and men called up for military service on the 30th April will therefore be required to present themselves at the place specified in the notice on the 7th May, men called up for the 1st May on the 8th May, and so forth.

Instructions to this effect are being issued to all recruiting offices for communication to men affected.

The exception referred to above is that the postponement does not apply to men who have held an exemption granted by a tribunal.

These men will be required to report at the place and on the date stated in their calling-up notices.

Notwithstanding this announcement, any man who so desires may report in the ordinary course at the recruiting office.

Until the 7th May the existing method of protection will continue in operation.

APPENDIX II.

Embargo on the Export of Foodstuffs.
(See Minute 4.)

(A.)

Dear Hankey,

April 27, 1917.

THE First Sea Lord . . . . . is most anxious to point out that foodstuffs are still being taken out of the country, in addition to the important objection mentioned in the telegram.

He asks that the matter may be put before the War Cabinet, so that orders may be given to stop this procedure at once. In the meantime, he has telegraphed to the Senior Naval Officer at Liverpool to suspend embarkation of the foodstuffs.

Yours sincerely,

H. H. SHARE.

Licence, dated the 25th April, granted to Burnyeat and Dalzell, of Liverpool, for provisions consigned to the Tonsberg Whaling Company, South Georgia Island, on steamship "Orwell."

The goods were required for stores for the crews of vessels engaged in the whaling industry in South Georgia. The whale-oil so procured is brought to this country for the use of the Ministry of Munitions, who consequently strongly supported the application. It was suggested, nevertheless, to the applicants that they should obtain these stores from abroad, but they replied that this was not practicable as it was very important that the steamship "Orwell" should get supplies in England and proceed direct, in order to save time.

Commander Longden, R.N., called here this morning and drew attention to the danger involved in allowing this export, and a telegram was immediately despatched from this Department to the Customs, asking them to refuse shipment.

C. W. R. PRESCOTT, Private Secretary,
Director, War Trade Department.

April 27, 1917.
Telegram from Senior Naval Officer, Liverpool, to Admiralty.

(Received April 26, 1917, 9:30 p.m.)

STRONG representation against allowing Norwegian steamship "Orwell," of the Tønsberg Whaling Company, from embarking 10,000L worth of foodstuffs over and above requirements of ship's company. Vessel bound for South Georgia Island. If vessel fell into enemy's hands she would victual a raider or submarine for months.

Stores being embarked under Privy Council licence.