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SECRET.

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WAR CABINET, 141.

*Minutes of a Meeting of the War Cabinet, held at 10, Downing Street, S.W.,  
on Monday, May 21, 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. A. HENDERSON, M.P.

The Right Hon. the VISCOUNT MILNER,  
G.C.B., G.C.M.G.

The Right Hon. A. BONAR LAW, M.P.,  
Chancellor of the Exchequer.

The following were also present :—

The Right Hon. LORD ROBERT CECIL, K.C.,  
M.P., Acting Secretary of State for  
Foreign Affairs (for Minutes 1 to 14).

The Right Hon. SIR E. CARSON, K.C.,  
M.P., First Lord of the Admiralty.

Major - General F. B. MAURICE, C.B.,  
Director of Military Operations (for  
Minutes 1 to 4).

Admiral SIR J. R. JELlicoe, G.C.B., O.M.,  
G.C.V.O., First Sea Lord of the  
Admiralty (for Minutes 1 to 14).

The Right Hon. C. ADDISON, M.D., M.P.,  
Minister of Munitions (for Minutes 16  
to 20).

The Right Hon. H. E. DUKE, K.C., M.P.,  
Chief Secretary for Ireland (for Minutes  
16 to 20).

The Right Hon. W. LONG, M.P., Secretary  
of State for the Colonies (for Minutes 16  
to 20).

The Right Hon. H. A. L. FISHER, LL.D.,  
President of the Board of Education  
(for Minutes 16 to 20).

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

Colonel E. D. SWINTON, C.B., D.S.O., *Assistant Secretary*.

The Western Front.

1. THE Director of Military Operations reported that the British troops had captured about 2,000 yards of the Hindenburg Line, and that their casualties in the previous twenty-four hours had been only 1,700. Since the 9th April, the total British casualties had been considerably less than the total reached during the Somme Battle. He undertook to obtain the exact figures of the losses since the 9th April.

Ammunition.

2. The Director of Military Operations gave the comparative figures for the artillery ammunition, in preparing for their attacks, expended by the British and French respectively. Of field gun ammunition the British had fired about the same number of rounds as the French; from medium guns the British had fired twice the amount of ammunition as the French; and from the heavy guns the British had fired five times as much as the French, the exact figures in the latter case being 63 rounds per gun as compared with 11.7 rounds per gun. In General Maurice's opinion, these figures showed that the French had not made sufficient use of their heavy artillery, which might have been one of the causes for the fact that they had not succeeded better.

## The Italian Front.

3. The Director of Military Operations stated that the news from Italy was good, the Italians having captured over 7,000 prisoners. Though they had once or twice reached the summit of Monte Santo, they had not got complete possession of that summit, which they required to complete the capture of the Monte Kuk position. Once that was done their operations would be further developed. He stated that the question of the heavy artillery ammunition for the Italian Army was causing great anxiety to General Cadorna, who was sending General Porro to Rome to go into the subject at a Conference of Ministers.

## Coal for Italy.

It was pointed out that the supply of shells for the Italian heavy artillery depended entirely on the supply of coal and steel, and some discussion took place as to the possibility of sending coal to Italy overland through France, instead of by sea, owing to the shortage of shipping.

Admiral Jellicoe stated that the French were also making urgent demands for coal, of which there seemed to be a chance that their Fleet might go short. He pointed out that the Shipping Controller had recently transferred ten ships from Archangel for the purpose of carrying coal to Italy.

The War Cabinet decided that—

Lord Robert Cecil should confer with the Departments concerned, in order to devise some arrangement by which more coal could be sent to Italy.

## The Cretan Division.

4. In reference to the previous decision of the War Cabinet on the subject of the Cretan Division (War Cabinet 132, Minute 8), the Director of Military Operations said that Lord Granville had telegraphed to the effect that M. Venizelos was still very anxious that the Cretan Division, which had been disembarked at Salonica, should be incorporated with the British force and be under the orders of General Milne. He explained that the Chief of the Imperial General Staff had no objection to this course, but considered that the French should first be consulted.

The War Cabinet decided that—

The Acting Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs should telegraph to the French Government to the effect that M. Venizelos had requested that the Cretan Division should be placed under the orders of the British Commander at Salonica, and that the British Government were willing to meet his views if the French Government concurred in this course.

Shipping Losses :  
British and Allied.

5. The First Sea Lord gave a summary of losses owing to the action of enemy submarines during the previous five days. He reported that, out of twenty-three vessels which had been damaged by torpedoes and beached since the 1st January, nineteen had been salvaged or were salvable, and four were total losses.

Naval Action in  
the Adriatic.

6. The First Sea Lord read out the Italian official account of the recent naval action in the Adriatic, and stated that he had received the congratulations of the Italian Minister of Marine and Naval Commander-in-Chief on the part played by H.M.S. "Dartmouth."

## T.B.D. "Setter."

7. The First Sea Lord reported that on the night of the 17/18th May whilst on convoy duty with Dutch ships the destroyer "Sylph" had collided with the destroyer "Setter" in thick weather and had sunk her. All hands had been saved.

## Submarine

8. The First Sea Lord reported a number of actions with enemy submarines, in three of which it seemed probable that the submarines had been sunk. He also reported an attack by the British seaplane No. 8663 on a German submarine off Lowestoft, in which it was probable that the submarine had been destroyed.

T.B.D.'s "Nugent"  
and "Myngs."

9. The First Sea Lord reported that the destroyers "Nugent" and "Myngs" had been in collision, and had both been damaged.

Enemy Destroyer  
Bombed.

10. The First Sea Lord reported that British aircraft from Dunkirk had dropped several bombs on a German destroyer off Zeebrugge.

Mine-Laying.

11. The First Sea Lord also reported that during the previous three days three mine-laying expeditions into the Heligoland Bight had been successfully carried out.

Bombardment of  
Turkish Coast  
Defences.

12. The First Sea Lord reported that H.M.S. "Raglan" and some small monitors had bombarded the land defences on Cape Helles, and had destroyed some 8-inch gun emplacements.

Norway.

13. The First Lord of the Admiralty drew attention to a telegram from the Commander-in-Chief, Grand Fleet, reporting the suspicious movements of a German merchant vessel, the "Heinrich Blumberg," inside the Holmengraa Fjord, indicating a probability that the vessel was attempting to obtain information about the sailing of convoys. He stated that the Commander-in-Chief, Grand Fleet, had pointed out before the great difficulty of stopping German raiders, caused by the fact that the Germans were in the habit of entering Norwegian territorial waters.

During the discussion it was stated that the Norwegians would be much upset if the British navy took action against hostile vessels within territorial waters; but that, on the other hand, there now seemed a possibility of getting Norway in on our side. To this course the Admiralty were now, on the whole, favourable; while the objections to it, which had been put forward by the War Office, had been due mainly to the possibility of hostile action by Sweden against Norway, of which the risk, however, had decreased very much.

The War Cabinet decided that—

The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs should keep under careful observation the possibility of bringing in Norway on the side of the Allies.

Serbia.

14. The First Lord of the Admiralty read a telegram received from Rear-Admiral Troubridge, in which the latter stated that the Prince Regent of Serbia had expressed a desire that Admiral Troubridge should proceed to England to give a verbal explanation to the British Government as to the position of the Serbian Army, the Prince Regent being of opinion that, unless matters could be improved, there would probably be a collapse on the part of Serbia.

The War Cabinet authorised—

The Admiralty to recall Admiral Troubridge so that he might report on the state of affairs in Serbia.

Stockholm :  
Conference.

15. The War Cabinet again considered the question of sending British representatives to attend the Socialist Conference at Stockholm.

Lord Robert Cecil reported that Messrs. Thorne, O'Grady, and Sanders, the delegates who had been sent to represent the Labour Party at Petrograd, had been asked by the Foreign Office to suspend their return journey at Bergen, in order that they might be available, if desired, to proceed to the Socialist Conference at Stockholm. He asked for immediate instructions from the War Cabinet as to whether they should remain in Scandinavia for the present or not. Lord Robert Cecil pointed out the danger of allowing the Conference at Stockholm to take place without the presence of any British representatives, either to watch the proceedings, or to combat the influence of the German Socialists, and in this connection he quoted the British Minister at Stockholm (telegram No. 1551, dated the 20th May). He urged that a strong deputation of the British Labour Party, headed perhaps by Mr. Arthur Henderson himself, should be sent to Stockholm. He also suggested that Mr. Henderson might with advantage be sent on a Special Mission to Petrograd, corresponding to that of M. Albert Thomas.

Mr. Henderson pointed out the difficulty of now sending British representatives to attend the Stockholm Conference. In accordance with the views of the War Cabinet, he had used his influence with the Executive Committee of the Labour Party not to take part in the Stockholm Conference, and a decision in this sense had been reached on the 11th May. Instead, he had suggested that a Conference of Allies should be held in London. This idea, however, was at present in abeyance pending the receipt of definite information as to a proposal by the Russian Socialists to hold a Conference in some neutral country. Only this morning, however, he had received enquiries from M. Thomas as to the proposed London Conference.

In the course of the discussion it transpired that the Conference now taking place at Stockholm consists merely of separate and successive conversations between the Dutch-Scandinavian Socialist Committee and representatives of the Socialist parties of the various belligerent nations. M. Vandervelde, the Belgian Socialist, has already taken part in such a conversation (Stockholm telegram No. 1492, dated the 15th May), and the arrival of Russian and German delegations at Stockholm is expected in the near future.

The War Cabinet were also informed that Messrs. Macdonald and Jowett, of the Independent Labour party, and Mr. Inkpin, of the British Socialist party, have applied for passports for Petrograd, presumably with the intention of stopping at Stockholm *en route*.

Whether these separate Conferences are eventually to be followed by a formal Conference to be attended by the Socialist parties of the various nations is not at present clear, and will probably depend on the results of these preliminary conversations.

It was generally agreed that if a Conference should take place, British representatives should attend. Otherwise the Russian and German Socialists would fraternise without any counteracting influence, probably with the worst results to the cause of the Allies, and a wholly false impression as to war-weariness among the Allies might be given to the enemy by the French Minority Socialists, and by written communications smuggled out of this country. It was realised, also, that a British refusal to participate would have a very serious effect in Russia and would strengthen the German anti-British propaganda in that country.

It was also agreed that Mr. Henderson, even though proceeding to the Conference as a representative of the British Labour party, might, as a member of the British War Cabinet, be placed in a very difficult position.

There was some discussion as to whether Mr. Ramsay Macdonald should be encouraged to attend the Conference. On

the one hand, it was urged that he could probably be counted on to take up a sound line in regard to annexations and indemnities, and that, owing to his well-known views in regard to the war, his opinions would carry weight, and might strengthen the democratic movement in enemy countries. On the other hand, it was realised that Mr. Macdonald's inclusion among the representatives of British Socialist parties would involve the presence of other members of the Independent Labour Party who could not be trusted to maintain a correct attitude. Although no decision was taken on this point, it was generally agreed that Mr. Ramsay Macdonald should not be allowed to go unless accompanied by a strong delegation of the British Labour Party.

The War Cabinet decided that—

- (a.) The three British representatives from Petrograd now at Bergen should no longer be detained there.
- (b.) With a view to a decision on the larger question, the Acting Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs should draft a telegram to M. Thomas, in Petrograd, explaining that the War Cabinet considered it dangerous for the Russian and German Socialists to meet without British representatives being present to put forward the British case, and asking him for his views on the subject: the draft to be submitted to the Prime Minister for his concurrence.

#### Ireland.

#### Statements in Parliament.

16. The War Cabinet had before them replies from Mr. Redmond (Paper G.T.-743), Sir John Lonsdale (Paper G.T.-743A), Mr. William O'Brien (Paper G.T.-743B), and Lord Midleton (Paper G.T.-772), to the Prime Minister's letter of the 16th May on the subject of the Government's proposals in regard to Ireland (War Cabinet 140, Appendix). The general character of the statements to be made in the afternoon by the Prime Minister in the House of Commons, and by Lord Curzon in the House of Lords, was considered by the War Cabinet. After discussion, the Prime Minister's draft was generally approved, subject to some amendments. This led to a preliminary discussion on various questions connected with the proposed Irish Convention.

#### The Composition of the Convention.

17. The War Cabinet had before them a rough proposal for the composition of the Irish Convention, which had been handed to the Prime Minister by Mr. Redmond (Appendix). It was generally agreed that the size of the Convention proposed by Mr. Redmond, namely, 171 members, was too large for the effective transaction of business. In this connection, attention was called to the following precedents of national Conventions summons for the formation of Constitutions :—

United States of America Convention, composed of 55 members.

Canadian Convention, composed of 33 members.

Australian Convention, composed of 60 members.

South African Convention, composed of 34 members.

It was pointed out, however, that a large Convention, such as was proposed by Mr. Redmond, would be able to delegate the actual drafting of the Irish Constitution to a committee elected from its own members, and that this would avoid the difficulty of obtaining a representative Convention composed of a smaller number of members. It was generally felt that, as the object of the proposed Convention is to invite Irishmen to try and settle their constitutional difficulties for themselves, its procedure should, as far as possible, be left for the decision of its members.

The War Cabinet decided that—

The Chief Secretary for Ireland should sound the Leaders of the various Irish Parties on their views as to the numbers and composition of the Convention.

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The Chairman of the Convention.

18. There was a short preliminary discussion as to who should be the Chairman of the Convention. It was generally agreed that the Chairman should be nominated by the Government, and not left to election by the Convention, but no decision was taken pending the result of Mr. Duke's enquiries.

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Secrecy of the Proceedings.

19. It was generally agreed that the Convention should sit with closed doors, and that its proceedings should be entirely secret. There was some discussion as to whether even the publication in the press of rumours relating to the Convention should not be prohibited, but no decision was taken on this point.

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Proposed Nitro-Cellulose Powder Factory at Henbury.

20. The War Cabinet authorised—

The Minister of Munitions to publish a statement that the decision not to proceed with the proposed nitro-cellulose powder factory at Henbury was taken by the War Cabinet after full examination of all the circumstances. (War Cabinet 139, Minute 2.)

2 Whitehall Gardens, S.W.  
May 21, 1917.

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## APPENDIX.

*Mr. Redmond's Rough Proposals for the Composition of the Irish Convention.*

					Representatives.
Chairmen of County Councils ...	...	...	...	...	34
Lord Mayors and Mayors ...	...	...	...	...	12
Chambers of Commerce ...	...	...	...	...	12
Trades' Unions ...	...	...	...	...	16
Catholic Church ...	...	...	...	...	12
Church of Ireland ...	...	...	...	...	6
Presbyterians ...	...	...	...	...	6
Irish Peers ...	...	...	...	...	6
Irish Party ...	...	...	...	...	6
Irish Unionist Party ...	...	...	...	...	6
O'Brienists ...	...	...	...	...	3
Sinn Feiners ...	...	...	...	...	15
Universities ...	...	...	...	...	3
Association of Secondary Teachers ...	...	...	...	...	2
National Teachers ...	...	...	...	...	2
Nominated element ...	...	...	...	...	30
			Total ...	...	<u>171</u>

