CONCLUSIONS of a Meeting of the Cabinet held at 10, Downing Street, S.W., on Thursday, 18th August, 1921, at 11.30 a.m.

PRESENT:

The Prime Minister (in the Chair)


The Rt. Hon. E.S. Montagu, M.P., Secretary of State for India.


The Rt. Hon. T.J. Macnamara, M.P., Minister of Labour.


THE FOLLOWING WERE ALSO PRESENT:

Captain The Rt. Hon. F.E. Guest, C.B.E., D.S.O., M.P., Secretary of State for Air.


Mr. T. Jones, Principal Assistant Secretary.
(1) With reference to Cabinet 61(21), Conclusion 1, the Lord Privy Seal consulted the Cabinet in regard to the procedure to be adopted in the House of Commons in view of the action of the House of Lords in amending the Safeguarding of Industries Bill, notwithstanding that the Speaker had decided that it was a Money Bill, and, under the Parliament Act, the Lords had no right to reject or amend it.

The Lord Privy Seal had consulted the Speaker, who stated that the Chair had no power to rule the amendments out of order. One course would be to move a Motion that the House do not consider the Lords’ Amendments, and the Speaker said this was permissible. The effect of this would be that the Bill would not go back to the House of Lords, but would become law if Parliament were kept in being for a month. The best course of all, however, appeared to be, first, to move that the amendments be now considered, and, later, that they be not accepted. If a conciliatory attitude were adopted in moving the rejection of the amendments, the Lord Privy Seal hoped that the Lords might be willing to give way, thus avoiding the application of the Parliament Act.

The Cabinet agreed —

To adopt the course proposed by the Lord Privy Seal, who was authorised to move on the same day that the Lords’ Amendments be now considered, and, second, to move to disagree with them.
(2) With reference to Cabinet 69 (21), Conclusion 2, the Prime Minister reported to the Cabinet that the Cabinet Committee, which had met on the previous evening on the subject of Irish Policy, had come to the conclusion that if, as seemed probable, the Government's offer to Sinn Fein was rejected and the truce came to an end, a new policy would have to be adopted involving a series of military and civil measures of the greatest importance for which the sanction of Parliament would be required. In these circumstances it appeared desirable not to prorogue Parliament but to adjourn it to some date a month or two hence, on the understanding that Parliament might be summoned at short notice if affairs in Ireland should necessitate it.

The Cabinet agreed —

(a) That his Majesty should be advised that Parliament should not be prorogued for the present, and that consequently no King's Speech would be necessary.

(b) That, following the precedent adopted in August, 1920, at the time of the negotiations with Bolshevik Russia, when a similar resolution was adopted, the following resolution should be moved in both Houses of Parliament:

"That this House, at its rising this day, do adjourn until Tuesday, October 18th, provided always that if it appears to the satisfaction of Mr. Speaker (in the case of the House of Lords, the Lord Chancellor), after consultation with His Majesty's Government, that the public interest requires that the House should meet at any earlier time during the adjournment, Mr. Speaker (in the case of the House of Lords, the Lord Chancellor) may give notice that he is so satisfied, and thereupon the House shall meet at the time stated in such notice, and shall transact its business as if it had been duly adjourned to that time. On re-assembly, the only business should be the emergency business for which Parliament was summoned, and Prorogation.

(c) That the Lord Privy Seal and the Leader of the House of Lords should today announce in the two Houses of Parliament that a motion would be moved on the following day which would give an opportunity—

(d) That, in order if possible to avoid two Debates on Ireland, the Lord Privy Seal and the Leader of the House of Lords should notify the Leaders of the Various Parties privately of the nature of the resolution to be moved.

(e) That the Clerk of the Council should take His Majesty's pleasure with regard to arrangements for a meeting of the Privy Council for the cancellation of the Order-in-Council already passed in regard to Prorogation.
IRELAND.

Duration of the Truce.

(3) In the course of the previous discussion the question was raised as to whether notice should be given by the British Government of their intention to denounce the truce on a particular date, or whether the position should be left in statu quo until the armistice was denounced or broken by the Sinn Feiners.

After a short discussion —

The question was remitted to the Cabinet Committee on Irish Policy.
Washington Conference
(4) With reference to Cabinet 68 (81), Conclusion 5, the Cabinet were informed that the question of the Conference on Disarmament and the abortive Pacific Conference was likely to be raised in a Debate on a Motion for the Adjournment the same evening, and that the Prime Minister proposed to take the opportunity to make a statement in regard to the recent Imperial Conference.
(5) With reference to Cabinet 45 (21), Conclusion 3, the policy and Cabinet had before them the following Papers in regard to

A Memorandum by the Secretary of State for the Colonies, covering a Memorandum by the Chief of the Air Staff on the Air Force Scheme of Control in Mesopotamia (Paper C.P.-3197),

A Memorandum by the Secretary of State for War (Paper C.P.-3240).

The Secretary of State for the Colonies and the Secretary of State for War fully developed the conflicting arguments contained in their respective Memoranda. The latter in particular strongly criticised the plan of relying on the Royal Air Force for the maintenance of order in Mesopotamia, which was regarded by his military advisers as unsound.

While the cost of maintaining white troops in sufficient force to ensure the defence of and the maintenance of order in Mesopotamia against all contingencies was recognised to involve an expenditure beyond what Mesopotamia could afford, and in excess of any grant-in-aid which Parliament would be prepared to sanction, the immediate withdrawal of the whole of the British troops and the substitution for them of Indian troops was agreed to be impracticable.

The question was raised as to whether, in existing financial conditions, the maintenance of our present position in Mesopotamia was justifiable. Emphasis was laid on its unpopularity in the country. On the other hand, the view was expressed that if the matter were fully explained to Parliament and a free vote were taken, the Government's policy would probably be supported.

The suggestion was made that, with a view to reducing our commitments in Mesopotamia, the question should be considered of substituting a Treaty with the King-Elect, the Emir Feisal, for the Mandate which had hitherto been contemplated, the draft of which was now before the League of Nations, and under which we should become responsible, inter alia, for the defence of Mesopotamia.
While recognising that some risks might be involved in their conclusion, the Cabinet, appreciating that it was impossible to insure completely against every risk, agreed —

(a) To take the following general decisions asked for by the Secretary of State for the Colonies:

(a) Full financial control of all expenditure in Mesopotamia to be vested in the Colonial Office as from 1st October, 1921.

(b) General Ironside to succeed General Haldane on that date on a one year's commission, with the definite task of inaugurating the Air Force scheme within 18 months.

(c) The garrison to be reduced to approximately 8 or 9 battalions with everything else reduced in due proportion by the end of the present financial year.

(d) The Air Force scheme as outlined by Air Marshal Trenchard to be inaugurated as from 1st October, 1922, all air and military forces in the country being responsible through the Governor to the Colonial Office.

(e) Any Indian troops required by the Colonial Office from the 1st October, 1921, onward to be paid for by direct arrangement between the Colonial Office and the India Office.

(f) The Estimates for 1922-25 should be framed upon the above basis, i.e., the 8 or 9 battalion scheme with reduced administrative staffs ruling for the first half of the financial year, and being succeeded for the second half by the 4-battalion Royal Air Force scheme.

(g) All arrears of expense and other capital charges already incurred to be settled without fail within the present financial year, thus enabling a fair start to be made in 1922-23.

(The Secretary of State for War, while stating his intention loyally to carry out the decisions of the Cabinet, asked that his dissent from this policy might be recorded.)

(ii) That the above decisions should, as contemplated by the Secretary of State for the Colonies (Para.8 of I.C.P.-S197) be "without prejudice to the over-riding and persistent right and duty of the General Staff to prevent their troops from being placed in positions which they consider unduly dangerous, or under conditions detrimental to their health or efficiency".

The Secretary of State for War undertook that the War Office should interpret this provision reasonably.
(iii) That the Secretary of State for War, in consultation with the Secretary of State for the Colonies, should examine the possibility of releasing British troops, whether Infantry or Cavalry, from Mesopotamia, for service in Ireland.

(iv) That the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, the Secretary of State for India, the Minister of Education, should consult with the Secretary of State for the Colonies in regard to the proposed Treaty with the King-Fleet, the Emir Feisal, and its effect on the Mandate. They were asked to refer to the Cabinet if they deemed it necessary.
With reference to Cabinet 45 (21), Conclusion 2 (a), the Cabinet had before them a Memorandum by the Secretary of State for the Colonies dealing with the situation in Palestine (Paper C.P.-3212).

The Cabinet were informed that recent reports from Palestine were of a disturbing character. Arabs and Jews were armed, or were arming, and a conflict might shortly ensue, particularly if the Moslem Christian Delegation, now in London, returned without having secured the withdrawal of Mr Balfour's pledge to the Zionists. The latter were naturally anxious as to their position, and wished to be reassured as to the Government's support. Two courses were open to the Cabinet. They could withdraw from their Declaration, refer the Mandate back to the League of Nations, set up an Arab National Government, and slow down or stop the immigration of Jews; or they could carry out the present policy with greater vigour and encourage the arming of the Jews with a view later on of reducing the numbers of the British garrison and cutting down expenses. A draft pronouncement, prepared by Dr Weizmann was read, for which he desired official approval, but objection was taken to its terms, and, in particular, to placing the control of immigration in the hands of the Jews and limiting it by the funds available.

In the course of the discussion which followed, stress was laid on the following considerations:

(i) The honour of the Government was involved in the Declaration made by Mr Balfour, and to go back on our pledge would seriously reduce the prestige of this country in the eyes of Jews throughout the world.

(ii) The Prime Ministers of Canada and South Africa had recently stated that our Zionist policy had proved helpful in those Dominions.

(iii) It was not expected that the problem could be easily or quickly solved, especially in view of the growing power of the Arabs in the territories bordering on Palestine.

(iv) On the other hand, it was urged that peace was impossible on the lines of the Balfour Declaration, which involved setting up a National Home for the Jews and respecting
the rights of the Arab population. The result of this inconsistency must be to estrange both Arabs and Jews, while involving us in futile military expenditure. Against this position it was argued that the Arabs had no prescriptive right to a country which they had failed to develop to the best advantage.

The Cabinet agreed —

In view of the absence of Mr Balfour, to adjourn the discussion.
With reference to Cabinet 38 (21), Conclusion 7 (b), the Cabinet had before them a Note by the Chairman, Sir Eric Geddes, covering the Interim Report of the Committee appointed to consider the decentralisation of the Housing of Government Staffs (Paper C.P. 3051).

The Cabinet agreed —

(a) To take note of the Report;

(b) To approve the appointment by the Treasury of the following Committee:

Sir Charles M. de Bartolome (Chairman)
(Ministry of Transport)

A Representative of the Office of Works.

Mr. Meiklejohn,
(Treasury)

"To investigate, on behalf of the Treasury, the work of all Government Departments in the London area, and to recommend what Departments or sections of Departments could be moved to an area beyond a two-mile radius from Whitehall".

2, Whitehall Gardens, S.W.1.

19th August, 1921.