WAR CABINET, 200.

Minutes of a Meeting of the War Cabinet held at 10, Downing Street, S.W., on
Tuesday, July 31, 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 Right Hon. A. Bonar Law, M.P.

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.
General Staff.
Lieutenant-General Sir C. F. N. Macready, K.C.B., K.C.M.G., Adjutant-General to
the Forces (for Minutes 1, 2, 3, and 4).
Major-General H. A. L. Taggart, C.B., D.S.O., Home Forces (for Minutes 1
and 2).

The Right Hon. Sir E. Carson, K.C., M.P.
The Right Hon. G. N. Barnes, M.P.
Lieutenant-General the Right Hon. J. C. Smuts, K.C.

Mr. H. W. Forster, M.P., Financial Secretary, War Office (for Minutes 4 and 5.)

Major L. Storr, Assistant Secretary.
Mr. Thomas Jones, Assistant Secretary.
THE War Cabinet had before them a Memorandum by the Adjutant-General, and submitted by the Secretary of State for War, on the formation of Soldiers' and Workmen's Committees and the position of Army Reserve munition workers and soldiers lent to munition works.

The representatives of the War Office explained that, largely under the influence of what had taken place in Russia, efforts were being made to induce soldiers to interest themselves actively in political agitation of a character likely to weaken the discipline of the Army. Cases had already occurred where meetings had been convened and addressed by soldiers, but, as there were grounds for thinking that the instigators were not fully cognisant of the King's Regulations, the offenders had been dealt with leniently. The relevant Regulation was that contained in No. 451, which reads as follows:

"An officer or soldier is forbidden to institute, or take part in, any meetings, demonstrations, or processions, for party or political purposes, in barracks, quarters, camps, or their vicinity. Under no circumstances whatever will he attend such meetings, wherever held, in uniform."

The question was raised whether a soldier was free to stand as a Parliamentary candidate, and it was explained that, with the permission of his Commanding Officer, he could apply to the Army Council to waive the King's Regulations in the particular circumstances, and this power applied to officers and privates alike.

Reference was also made to the disturbances which had taken place on the 28th July in connection with the breaking up of a meeting at the Brotherhood Church, Southgate, in which some soldiers were alleged to have participated. Such disturbances, it was pointed out, fell to be dealt with by the Home Secretary and not by the Army Council, as they were breaches of the Civil Law.

The War Cabinet decided that—

(a.) Soldiers could not be permitted to join Soldiers' and Workmen's Councils;
(b.) The King's Regulations must be strictly and impartially enforced;
(c.) The Secretary of State for War should arrange that public attention should be called by a question in Parliament to the disturbances on the 28th July, and an announcement made that the Government intended to enforce Civil and Military Law regardless of whether the meetings were likely to be for or against the Government's war policy.

In reaching these decisions, the War Cabinet did not overlook the fact that they would have to enforce their policy in all circumstances.

The War Cabinet considered, further, the special cases of Army Munition Workers and soldiers lent to Munition Works, who are liable to be recalled to the Colours if they join in a strike and cease work.

It was stated that some 22,000 were actually soldiers in uniform; members of the Reserve were regarded as practically civilians. The arrangements at present in force are that, in the case of a strike where the soldiers were likely to be molested, they would be withdrawn for protection to certain camps. Secret labour meetings were being held in some centres, and resolutions were being adopted pledging the men, in the case of a strike and the withdrawal of the soldiers, to remain out on strike until the soldiers were returned.
Recently, during disputes at Barrow and Liverpool, efforts were made, but only with small success, to induce the soldiers to join with the strikers. These strikes were not authorised by the union executives, but were organised locally.

The War Cabinet decided that—

(a) In the case of a properly authorised strike it was important to withdraw the soldiers from the district for their own protection, and also in view of pledges given by Ministers that soldiers should not be used for purposes of intimidation.

(b) In the case of unauthorised strikes—i.e., those initiated without the consent of the Trades Union Executive concerned—soldiers joining with the strikers should be recalled to the colours.

Army Pay.

3. The War Cabinet decided that—

The secretary should arrange for the distribution of the weekly report of the Ministry of Labour in full, and of any special reports from other departments throwing light on the labour situation in the country.

4. With reference to War Cabinet 198, Minute 11, the War Cabinet considered a memorandum by the Secretary of State for War on the question of granting increases of pay to soldiers in His Majesty's army (Paper G.T.-1562).

Lord Derby explained that pressure was being brought by the General Federation of Trades Unions on members of the House of Commons with the object of raising the minimum pay of the private soldier to 3s. a day. This did not imply an addition of 2s. to every soldier, but it aimed at bringing the lowest pay up to 3s. It was estimated that such a scheme would involve the country in an increased expenditure of 120 millions per annum on the present army strength.

The War Cabinet was favourably disposed to some improvement being made in existing scales, and that, if possible, there should be special recognition of men who had served long periods at the front, but it was realised that differentiation, on the basis of length of service or character of service, or other similar test, was not easy.

The War Cabinet decided to ask the following Committee—

Sir Edward Carson (Chairman),
Mr. Stanley Baldwin, M.P. (Treasury),
Mr. H. W. Forster, M.P., and a military representative (War Office),
Dr. Macnamara (Admiralty),
Mr. G. H. Roberts, M.P. (Board of Trade),
Mr. T. Jones (Secretary),

to consider the whole problem of an increase in the pay of soldiers and sailors, and report.

Wood.

5. The Financial Secretary to the War Office informed the War Cabinet that he had gone to Bradford recently to investigate the situation as regards the supply and distribution of wool.

Mr. Forster undertook to submit to the War Cabinet, through the Secretary of State for War, a report on the subject at an early date.
6. The Chief of the Imperial General Staff read a communique from the Field-Marshal Commanding-in-Chief in France, which stated that at 3:15 A.M. that morning the offensive had been resumed by the forces under his command to the north-west of Ypres and north of the Yser. General Robertson stated that there were three immediate objectives, which embraced a front of about 15 miles and a depth of about 2½ miles. Up to the time of the despatch of the communique the attack was progressing successfully, and the first objective had been achieved. French troops were co-operating in the attack. General Robertson explained, and demonstrated on a map, the nature and extent of the present undertaking.

7. Reference was made to an official communique by the Romanian Commander-in-Chief regarding the offensive on the Southern Front, and stated that so far 80 enemy guns had been captured.

8. The Chief of the Imperial General Staff stated that he had received a report from the Russian Commander-in-Chief describing the continued deterioration in the moral of the Russian Armies. He hoped to be able to make a stand on the line which was held by General Brusiloff’s Army before the latter made his big attack in 1916. If they could not hold that line, the Russian and Romanian forces to the south would be in danger of being outflanked. The Russian Commander-in-Chief concluded his telegram with a strong appeal to the British Government to conduct at once a vigorous offensive on the Western Front, in order to compel the Germans to withdraw as many Divisions as possible from the East. General Robertson said that, in his reply, he was urging the Russian Commander-in-Chief to use his utmost endeavours to arrest the retirement beyond the 1916 line.

The Chief of the Imperial General Staff read a telegram (No. 1166) from Major Neilson, which stated that a War Council, attended by Prime Minister Kerensky and several of the most prominent military Commanders in Russia, revealed a considerable and serious vacillation in regard to the re-enforcement of discipline. Reference was also made to General Knox’s despatch (B 3), dated the 10th July, 1917 (Paper G.T.-1553), indicating the extent to which indiscipline prevailed almost throughout the Russian Army, and the collapse of moral generally. Particular attention was drawn to a statement which had appeared in several Russian papers, that General Klembovski, Commander-in-Chief of the Northern Front, was reported to have said that the present offensive was all-important, as a winter campaign was impossible, and all the combatants would soon begin negotiating for peace.

9. The First Sea Lord reported that a bombing raid was carried out on the night of the 28th/29th on the rolling-stock in the naval areas of Trourout, Middelkerke, and Ghistesles, and also on the Bruges Osie Works. All our machines returned safely.

10. The First Sea Lord stated that the Senior Naval Officer, Gibraltar, had communicated a report from torpedo-boat 90 to the effect that she had attacked, and, she hoped, damaged, an enemy submarine with a depth charge, 6 miles south-south-west of Cape Spartel.
11. The First Sea Lord stated that he had been informed by Admiral Sims that the latter had received a telegram from the United States Government to the effect that, in order to take part in an International Naval Conference, which they considered should be held, Admiral Sims and Admiral Mayo, the Commander-in-chief of the United States Atlantic Fleet, had been deputed by the Government at Washington to attend as their naval representatives.

2, Whitehall Gardens, S.W.,
July 31, 1917.