WAR CABINET, 210.

Minutes of a Meeting of the War Cabinet held at 10, Downing Street, S.W., on Friday, August 10, 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 EARL OF DERBY, K.G.,

The Right Hon. A. BONAR LAW, M.P.

The Right Hon. SIR E. CARSON, K.C., M.P.

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

Lieutenant-General the Right Hon. J. C. SMUTS, K.C.

The following were also present:—


The Right Hon. the EARL OF DERY, K.G., G.C.V.O., C.B., Secretary of State for War.


The Right Hon. LORD ROBERT CECIL, K.C., M.P., Minister of Blockade.


The Right Hon. SIR JAMES MACLAY, Bt., Shipping Controller (for Minute 16).

The Right Hon. the LORD NEWTON (for Minutes 1 and 2).


Mr. JOSEPH DAVIES (for Minute 16).

Mr. C. J. PHILLIPS (for Minute 16).

Prisoners of War.

1. THE War Cabinet had before them a Memorandum by Lord Newton on Procedure regarding Prisoners of War (Paper G.T.—1897), with particular reference to the proposed transfer of enemy prisoners from Alexandra Palace to the Isles of Man. As the Alexandra Palace is required by the Admiralty for the use of the Royal Naval Air Service, and the question was likely to be affected by the Further Report of the Committee on Air Organisation...
and Home Defence against Air Raids (Paper G.T.–1558), it was decided—

To adjourn further consideration of the question until this report had been circulated.

In the meantime the Secretary of State for War undertook to do his best to find alternative accommodation for the Royal Naval Air Service.

The War Cabinet further decided that—

For the present the prisoners of war should remain at Alexandra Palace.

2. The War Cabinet authorised—

The War Office and the Foreign Office to proceed with the preliminary arrangements for a conference at Berne, regarding prisoners, with representatives of Turkey.

3. The Chief of the Imperial General Staff reported that the Arabs north of Medina had taken fifty prisoners in one place, and in another the Turks had lost fifty killed and fifty prisoners, and that the Hedjaz Railway had been torn up in several places.

4. The Chief of the Imperial General Staff stated that General Baratoff had reported that preparations were being made by the General Officer Commanding in the Caucasus to co-operate with General Maude with a force of 18,500 men and 3,000 animals, with transport, which would be placed under General Maude's orders.

5. The Chief of the Imperial General Staff stated that on the Russian front the retreat was slower, but that this was mainly due to the failure of the enemy to press forward. General Mackensen was said to be in front of a very important bridge over the Sereth, and the Chief of the Imperial General Staff had telegraphed to urge the destruction of this bridge in the event of a further Russian retirement.

6. With reference to War Cabinet 208, Minute 10, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff reported that General van Deventer had already sent two telegrams in regard to the reverse at Lindi, when the 50th Punjabis were cut up. General van Deventer intended to attack the position again today. In these circumstances he asked if the War Cabinet wished the instructions of the previous day to be carried out.

The War Cabinet decided that—

The enquiries should be postponed until after news had been received of the fresh attack.

7. The First Sea Lord reported that one of our latest destroyers, the "Recruit," was sunk last night off the North Hinder, probably by a floating mine, with a loss of about 25 of all ranks. The survivors were being brought off by another destroyer.
3. The First Sea Lord reported that the French Commander-in-Chief claimed to have sunk an enemy submarine, near Corfu, by seaplanes.

9. The First Sea Lord reported that the sinkings of German submarines for the quarter ending the 30th June were 9 certainties and 7 probables.

The War Cabinet took note of the German report that they had lost during the last six months at the rate of three or a little more submarines per month.

10. The War Cabinet had a preliminary discussion on the subject of the Pope's peace proposals (Vatican telegram No. 39, dated the 9th August, 1917).

Further consideration was adjourned until the receipt of the complete proposals.

11. The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs reported that the War Cabinet Memorandum (G.T.-1589 A) on the submarine situation had been telegraphed en bloc to Sir Cecil Spring-Rice on the 3rd August.

12. With reference to War Cabinet 207, Minute 5, the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs reported the receipt of a communication from M. Nabokoff, of the Russian Embassy, dated the 8th August, conveying a message from the Russian Foreign Minister to the effect that, although the Russian Government do not deem it possible to prevent Russian delegates from taking part in the Stockholm Conference, they regard this Conference as a party concern and its decisions in no wise binding upon the liberty of action of the Government.

A copy of this message has been sent to Mr. Henderson before the meeting of the Labour Conference to-day.

13. The War Cabinet had before them an extract from the Minutes of the 7th meeting of the Mesopotamia Administration Committee on the Control of the Military Forces at Aden (Paper G.T.-1643).

The War Cabinet decided that—

The War Office should take over the control of military operations and command of the troops and fortress at Aden and in the Aden sphere.

14. The War Cabinet took note of the following decisions by Lord Milner’s Man-Power Committee (G.T.-1647):—

"(a.) That the recruiting organisation should be embodied in the National Service Department;"

"(b.) That in view of the transfer of functions decided upon, the decision of outstanding questions of detail concerning Man-Power and Recruiting be postponed until the Director-General of the National Service Department had had an opportunity of being heard upon them, with the following exception, viz.:—"

"(c.) That in regard to the exemption from military service of men engaged in shipbuilding in Canada, the Secretary of the War Cabinet be instructed to reply to Sir W.
Committee on War Expansion of Public Departments.

15. Lord Curzon informed the War Cabinet that he had been asked in the House of Lords whether the Government would publish the Interim Report of the Committee of Enquiry into the War Expansion of Public Departments (Paper G.T.-644).

The War Cabinet decided that—

Inasmuch as this was a Committee appointed by the Prime Minister to advise the Cabinet, it was not desirable, as a matter of principle and precedent, to lay the Report on the Table.

Co-ordination of American Business.

16. The War Cabinet considered the proposal to set up a Board for the Co-ordination of American Business (Paper G.T.-1642) (Appendix), in view of the need of systematising the demands on America of various Government Departments, and of improving cabling arrangements.

The War Cabinet decided that—

For the present the work proposed to be allocated to the Board should be entrusted to Mr. C. J. Phillips, who, in cases of difficulty, should refer to Lord Robert Cecil, who should have full powers to decide on behalf of the War Cabinet. *

* This decision was subject to confirmation by the Prime Minister after he had seen Sir William Wiseman.

2, Whitehall Gardens, S.W.,
August 10, 1917.
APPENDIX.

G.T.-1642.

PROPOSED BOARD FOR THE CO-ORDINATION OF AMERICAN BUSINESS.

Memorandum by Mr. Joseph Davies.

LORD NORTHCLIFFE having cabled asking for better arrangements for dealing with American business, the following proposal was, in accordance with instructions from the Prime Minister, drafted and issued to all the Departments concerned:—

1. That a Board shall be constituted to be known as the "American Board," and to be directly responsible to the War Council.

2. That the work of the Board shall be—

(a.) To systematise and co-ordinate all American business, serving as a clearing house for cables, acting promptly on all problems and American business matters coming before it, and aiming to prevent delays and misunderstandings, thus establishing closer and better working relations with our representatives in America.

(b.) In carrying out the duties of the Board, to keep in view the promotion of good relations between this country, France, Italy, and Russia in respect to demands on America.

(c.) To co-operate with any committee formed for the purpose of securing joint action by this country, France, Italy, and Russia in respect to demands on America.

(d.) To present to the War Council a weekly report of work done.

3. To facilitate the carrying out of the work, conferences with representatives of the Departments concerned in American business to be held as frequently as may be necessary.

4. The existing routine of cabling and carrying on business between the Departments and our representatives in America to be continued; but copies of all cables relating to American business to be immediately supplied to the Board.

The replies of the Departments can be summarised as follows:—

The Foreign Office, War Office, Ministry of Munitions, Admiralty, Treasury, Board of Trade, Air Board, and Oil Pool are in favour, subject to their own authority and responsibility not being impaired.

The Shipping Controller, Wheat Commission, and Sugar Commission fail to see any great advantage in the proposal.

As a result of the communications from the Departments, the following scheme is submitted as likely to command general assent:—

1. A Committee to be set up called the American Board.

2. The Committee to be responsible to the War Council periodically to the Council.

3. The Committee to be constituted as follows:—

(a.) The Chairman.

(b.) A small Executive Committee with a General Secretary to be nominated by the Prime Minister.

(c.) Representatives of each of the Government Departments concerned in American business. These representatives would need to attend only when business concerning their respective Departments was to be discussed. But the Executive of the General Committee would keep constantly in touch with them.

4. The functions of the Committee would be to systematise and co-ordinate American business, serving as a clearing-house for cables, acting promptly on all problems coming before it, and aiming to prevent delays and misunderstandings, thus establishing closer and better working relations with our representatives in America.
5. The Committee would co-operate with any body formed for the purpose of securing joint action between this country, France, Italy, and Russia in respect to demands on America.

6. The existing routine of cabling and carrying on business between the Departments and our representatives in America to be continued, but the Central Committee would be supplied with copies of all such cables as shall be necessary to enable them to discharge the functions described in 4.

7. The Board to be empowered to take such offices and engage and settle pay of such staff as may be necessary, and for this purpose to be able to demand an imprest of such sums as may be required from time to time for the proper conduct of their work.

August 8, 1917.