WAR CABINET, 268.

Minutes of a Meeting of the War Cabinet held at 10, Downing Street, S.W., on Thursday, November 8, 1917, at 11:30 A.M.

Present:

The Right Hon. A. BONAR LAW, M.P. (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. G. N. BARNES, M.P.

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

The following were also present:—


The Right Hon. W. HAYES FISHER, M.P., President of the Local Government Board (for Minutes 9 and 10).

The Right Hon. H. A. L. FISHER, LL.D., M.P., President of the Board of Education (for Minutes 9 and 10).

SIR THOMAS L. HEATH, K.C.B., K.C.V.O., Joint Permanent Secretary to the Treasury (for Minute 9).

Mr. W. Bowyer, C.B., Chief Charity Commissioner (for Minute 9).

Mr. J. Lamb, C.B., Assistant Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (for Minutes 9 and 10).

Mr. A. V. Symonds, C.B., Local Government Board (for Minute 9).

The Right Hon. R. MUNRO, K.C., M.P., Secretary for Scotland (for Minutes 9 and 10).

Lieutenant-Colonel W. DALLY JONES, C.M.G., Acting Secretary.

Captain CLEMENT JONES, Assistant Secretary.

Mr. THOMAS JONES, Assistant Secretary.
1. THE Director of Military Operations explained on the map the great success that had been won by General Allenby in capturing Gaza. On the 5th November his cavalry had made a successful advance to the north of Beersheba, outflanking the Turkish left. At midnight on the 6th the 21st Corps had attacked Gaza, captured it, and pushed through to its northern and eastern outskirts. General Allenby had reported considerable captures of prisoners, ammunition, stores, and guns, but no exact details were yet available. Our aeroplanes reported that the main bodies of Turks were in retreat, and had gone back 25 miles. Provided that a sufficient water-supply was forthcoming, our cavalry would be able to pursue the enemy, but our infantry could not be expected to go more than 10 miles north of Gaza until the railway extension was constructed. It was, therefore, doubtful how far the pursuit could be continued. The new defensive line to be taken up by the Turks would be that of Jaffa to Jerusalem. The enemy were reported to have made no counter-attacks. Our casualties were reported as 1,400, of whom 112 were killed.

The War Cabinet decided that—

A telegram should be sent to General Allenby, in the name of the War Cabinet, congratulating him upon his success, when the captures of the enemy had been reported: the Director of Military Operations to draft such a message, which would be submitted to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and despatched on receipt of details of captures.

2. The Director of Military Operations reported that General Maude had telegraphed that on the 2nd November the Turks had advanced southward from Tekrit. Reconnaissance disclosed the fact that two Turkish Divisions (the 51st and 52nd) were isolated and unsupported, and therefore at midnight on the 6th November General Maude attacked them with complete success, carrying all the Turkish trenches, and took Tekrit. General Maude reported that the co-operation of the artillery, cavalry, and flying corps had been excellent. Tekrit is about 90 miles from Bagdad, and General Maude does not intend to stay there, on account of the exposure to his flank which would result. What he had done was to push the two Turkish Divisions back, and now he would return to Samarrah.

The War Cabinet decided that—

The substance of this satisfactory information should be given to the press, making it clear that General Maude's return to Samarrah was in no way a forced retirement, but part of his deliberate pre-arranged plan.

3. The Director of Military Operations reported that the Italian retirement was being carried out in a rather more satisfactory order and the rearguards were fighting.

The War Cabinet discussed the importance of our seizing the present opportunity to get control of the naval forces in the Adriatic. It was suggested that a telegram should be sent to the Prime Minister from the War Cabinet urging him to take advantage of the opportunity to press for full control.

The Director of Military Operations suggested that the terms of reference should be made wider than the Adriatic alone, in order that we might control the route from Marseilles to Genoa, which is at present particularly dangerous and not under our control.
Lord Derby said now that the Taranto route was blocked by movement of troops to Italy, and therefore was unable to be used for Salonica movements, it was imperative that we should get full control of all the sea routes in the Mediterranean.

The War Cabinet decided that—

The Deputy First Sea Lord, after consultation with the First Lord, should draft a telegram, to be sent to the Prime Minister,

(a.) Requesting him to press for our full control of the naval forces in Italian waters and sea routes for troops;

(b.) Suggesting that Admiral Wemyss, who is familiar with the details of the Mediterranean Command, should proceed to Paris to put the views of the Cabinet before the Prime Minister.

Submarines.

4. The Deputy First Sea Lord reported that no British ships had been sunk on the previous day, and only one foreign ship.

Bombing Raids.

5. The Deputy First Sea Lord reported that he had received information from Dunkirk to the effect that our airmen had dropped bombs on Thourout Railway Station and on a moving train near Lichtervelde. Several direct hits on track and junctions had been reported. All our machines had returned safely.

Air Offensive.

6. With reference to War Cabinet 262, Minute 10, the question was again raised as to whether the price that we were paying for our raids was not too high. It was pointed out that four Handley-Page machines out of ten had been lost, and it was feared that the impression still prevails at the Front that the War Cabinet want raids at any price, regardless of weather.

The War Cabinet asked—

Lord Derby to communicate with General Trenchard, expressing the hope that it was understood that the War Cabinet did not wish raids to be made in unsuitable weather.

Proposed Supreme Inter-Allied Council and Allied General Staff.

7. With reference to War Cabinet 263, Minute 13—

The Secretary of State for War undertook to circulate the terms for the new Supreme Inter-Allied Council, showing all the alterations and amendments that had been made since the first proposal, and giving them in the final complete form.

American Mission to England.

8. Mr. Balfour informed the War Cabinet that Colonel House, Mr. Crosby, and experts of all the American Departments had arrived in this country, and that he would be having an interview with Colonel House the same day.

Welfare of the Blind.

9. The War Cabinet had before them a memorandum on the welfare of the blind, by the President of the Local Government Board (Paper G.T.-2348), and a memorandum by the Secretary for Scotland (Paper G.T.-2483), based on the report of the Departmental Committee appointed in May, 1914.

Mr. Hayes Fisher said that the problem of reducing the proportion of the blind to the population was extremely hopeful; if
suitable measures were taken. Something could be done by improved administrative action on the part of the Local Government Board itself, and it might be possible to persuade Industrial Councils to induce workmen more often to adopt the wearing of glasses. The elementary education of the blind was very good, but more might be done in secondary schools, especially in those for girls. The crux of the question, however, was the adequate provision of workshops, where the blind who have been trained would be suitably employed. At present there are only some 3,000 places, and 3,000 more were required. It was true that these workshops could not be built during the war, but it was desirable to lay down a policy now. Additional funds were also needed to provide pensions for the blind who were incapable of earning their living. Thousands of pensions were being administered by a large number of independent Societies, with a consequent waste of effort. It was necessary that the activities of these Societies should be supervised and co-ordinated by the Government, and grants-in-aid made to them. For this purpose, and for carrying out the other recommendations, Mr. Hayes Fisher recommended the setting up of a special department in the Local Government Board, with an Advisory Committee of persons associated with the care of the blind.

Sir Thomas Heath said it would be in accord with recent as well as older precedents that the whole of the proposed expenditure (500,000£ capital expenditure and 250,000£ annual expenditure) should not fall on the Treasury, but should be met in part by contributions from the Local Authorities concerned. The scheme as outlined was rather far-reaching, and would probably require legislation to give effect to it.

Mr. Hayes Fisher thought that it was not unreasonable to look for local contributions towards maintenance and training. He confidently believed that there would be a substantial credit side to the training account, as many of the blind could become, in a great measure, self-supporting. Capital expenditure would, he thought, have to fall on the Treasury, as the workshops would serve areas which would not necessarily coincide with administrative and rating areas.

Mr. Munro said he supported generally the recommendations as set forth by Mr. Hayes Fisher, and they both agreed that there should be a separate Advisory Committee for Scotland.

The War Cabinet decided to authorise—

(a.) The setting up of a special department in the Local Government Board and the Local Government Board for Scotland to deal with the question, and to sanction the expenditure required for immediate administrative purposes;

(b.) The establishment of an Advisory Committee for England and Wales, and one for Scotland, on the lines proposed, whose first duty would be to advise the Departments on the preparation of schemes for the consideration of the War Cabinet.

10. The War Cabinet had before them the following documents:

Memoranda by Mr. H. A. L. Fisher (Papers G.T.-2150 and 2370).
A Memorandum by Mr. Barnes (Paper G.T.-2394).
A Memorandum by Mr. Munro (Paper G.T.-2448).

Mr. Herbert Fisher said the Bill had secured an amount of agreement far greater than he had anticipated. There was now no opposition from religious bodies. He had gone through the clauses of the Bill with Cardinal Bourne, and no insuperable difficulties had arisen. The Local Education authorities disliked one or two of the
administrative clauses, but he thought their apprehensions could be allayed. The friends of half-time were ashamed to come out into the open to defend the system, and there was thus an opportune moment for emancipating some 30,000 children. He felt very strongly that such widespread unanimity was not likely to recur, and the Government should seize it to push the Bill through at the earliest possible moment.

The War Cabinet recognised that the increasing unanimity which was now apparent was due in a special manner to the series of striking meetings which the Minister of Education had held throughout the country.

Mr. Barnes said that organised labour was strongly in favour of pushing on with the Bill, and that a deputation would probably want to wait on the Prime Minister to say so.

Mr. Munro said he desired the authority of the War Cabinet to introduce an Education Bill for Scotland this session under the Ten Minutes Rule. Subject to the approval of the Bill, which Mr. Munro said would be circulated shortly, the War Cabinet gave the necessary authority.

The War Cabinet were in full sympathy with the considerations urged by Mr. Fisher, and decided to ask the Prime Minister to make an early announcement that, subject to the exigencies of the war, it was proposed to give precedence to the Education Bill next session.

2, Whitehall Gardens, S.W.,
November 8, 1917.

(Initialled) A. B. L.