MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE WAR CABINET, HELD AT 10, DOWNING STREET, S.W., ON WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 12, 1917, AT 11.30 A.M.

PRESENT:

THE PRIME MINISTER (in the Chair).


THE RIGHT HON. THE VISCOUNT MILLER, G.C.B., G.C.M.G.

THE FOLLOWING WERE ALSO PRESENT:

THE RIGHT HON. A. J. BALFOUR, O.M., M.P., SECRETARY OF STATE FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS (FOR MINUTES 1 TO 14).

THE RIGHT HON. THE EARL OF DERRY, KG., G.C.V.O., C.B., SECRETARY OF STATE FOR WAR (FOR MINUTES 1 TO 14).

MAJOR-GENERAL F. B. MAURICE, C.B., DIRECTOR OF MILITARY OPERATIONS (FOR MINUTES 1 TO 14).


THE RIGHT HON. W. LONG, M.P., SECRETARY OF STATE FOR THE COLONIES (FOR MINUTES 15 TO 17).

THE RIGHT HON. LORD RHONDDA, FOOD CONTROLLER (FOR MINUTES 15 AND 16).

MR. U. F. WINTOUR, C.B., C.M.G., PERMANENT SECRETARY, MINISTRY OF FOOD (FOR MINUTES 15 AND 16).

PROFESSOR W. G. ADAMS (FOR MINUTES 15 TO 17).


THE RIGHT HON. THE VISCOUNT GOSCHEN, FOOD PRODUCTION DEPARTMENT (FOR MINUTES 15 AND 16).


MR. J. F. BEALE, SECRETARY, WHEAT COMMISSION (FOR MINUTES 15 AND 16).


LIEUTENANT-ColONEL W. DALLY JONES, C.M.G., ACTING SECRETARY.

FLEET PAYMASTER P. H. ROW, R.N., ASSISTANT SECRETARY.

MR. THOMAS JONES, ASSISTANT SECRETARY.

CAPTAIN CLLEMENT JONES, ASSISTANT SECRETARY.

[1365—296]
Situation in Macedonia.

1. THE War Cabinet had before them a report by the Chief of the Imperial General Staff in regard to the situation in Macedonia (Paper G.T.-261.5), dated the 14th November, 1917.

The Director of Military Operations said that since the date of the report by the Chief of the Imperial General Staff the only material changes which had taken place had already been reported to the War Cabinet. One additional German division had appeared on the Salonica front, where, since the 14th November, there had arrived altogether nine German battalions and thirteen Bulgarian battalions. With regard to the strength of the Allied forces, the report showed that on the 14th November the strength of the British was down by 7,000 men. Since then we had sent drafts, and the position now was that, while we were 3,000 down as regards infantry, we were 3,000 up in other arms. For all practical purposes it might be said that the British force was up to strength. General Milne's force was being strengthened by the sending of a few more heavy guns from Egypt, and some aeroplanes of the best type. So far as the French force was concerned, the greatest change had been the change in command. General Guillaumat, who was described as a plain, blunt soldier, had commanded at Verdun after General Nivelle had become Commander-in-Chief, and was regarded by M. Clemenceau as a first-class man, had been appointed to succeed General Sarrail. The strength of the French force had not improved, whereas the English divisions, with an establishment of 12,000 rifles, to-day mustered 10,500 rifles. The French, on the other hand, with an establishment of 9,000 rifles, only mustered 5,000. There was no sign of improvement, and General Sarrail had lately said he would have to send home on leave 4,000 men, for no better reason than that they had been out there for eighteen months. With regard to the Greeks and Serbians, their strength had been increased, the latter by about 4,000—some from Russia and some from Bizerta. Altogether it appeared that there were 160,000 rifles on the Allies' side, as compared with 203,000 rifles on the enemy's. General Maurice said that, in his opinion, this superiority of about 40,000 rifles would not be sufficient to make an enemy attack on a large scale dangerous, provided that the Allies were well dug-in and well commanded.

The questions were asked—

(a.) Supposing that the enemy did attack, what notice we should be likely to receive?
(b.) What steps we should take?

To these the Director of Military Operations replied, with regard to the first question, that it was impossible to guarantee any notice. The nature of the country behind the enemy's front made it difficult to obtain early information, and the only indication of a probable attack that we could get would be the failure to trace enemy divisions on other points. He added that the present season was not favourable for operations on a large scale, and that the most favourable time of the year would be from March onwards. As regards the second question, the only action that we could take might possibly be to send heavy artillery from Egypt; this was the only reserve available. There was no army of manoeuvre that could be used.

The next question put to General Maurice was, In the event of a sudden attack by the enemy, what arrangements had been made to fall back? General Maurice replied that our own line of retreat had been carefully prepared, but in this as in other matters it had been impossible to find out from General Sarrail what preparations had been made for the Allied forces as a whole. He understood that the question had been referred to the Supreme War Council at Versailles.

The War Cabinet requested—

The Director of Military Operations to telegraph to General
Wilson to ask what progress he had made in ascertaining the facts of the Salonica situation, as the Cabinet considered the matter pressing.

The Western Front.

2. The Director of Military Operations was asked whether he thought the Germans, in advertising a forthcoming attack on the Western front, were really planning operations elsewhere. General Maurice said that, in his opinion, based on present information, the enemy really did mean to attack on the Western front. Another enemy division had arrived in Alsace from Russia, and two more were on the way. During the last two months fifteen divisions, on balance, had been transferred from the Eastern to the Western front (including Italy), and these had not been replaced. In addition, 100,000 men had been combed out of the Eastern front and sent to the West. The Director of Military Operations did not think that the enemy would press their attack in Italy, seeing that they had already had opportunities of doing so, but had not availed themselves of them, and the season for operations in the mountains was getting late. The balance of evidence appeared to be in favour of the enemy attacking in France and Flanders rather than in Italy, where there may be a very heavy fall of snow at any time. It must be remembered, however, that the Italian army might give up their ground.

Cambrai.

3. The Director of Military Operations submitted the following statement in regard to guns taken and lost by the British at Cambrai between the 20th November and the 10th December, 1917:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Guns lost</th>
<th>Field</th>
<th>Heavy</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18-pr. 4.5-in. how</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-pr. 6-in. how.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>144</strong></td>
<td><strong>113</strong></td>
<td><strong>138</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Daily Messenger and Telephone to Versailles.

4. After some discussion as to improving the means of communication between Versailles and London, the War Cabinet decided that—

(a.) The Secretary should make the necessary preparations for sending a messenger daily to Versailles, in order that the Supreme War Council should be supplied with the latest information at the earliest possible moment.

(b.) The Secretary should ascertain from the Postmaster-General whether it would be possible to have a private British telephone service established between London and Versailles.

Palestine.

5. The War Cabinet discussed the question whether General Allenby should remain where he now is, or exploit the defeat which he has inflicted on the Turks.

It was pointed out that our Intelligence Service with regard to Turkey was very defective and compared unfavourably with our Intelligence arrangements on the Western front. For instance, when General Allenby had been asked how many men would be required, in his opinion, to capture Jerusalem and hold it he had replied that the Turks could bring against him 18 divisions in addition to 2 German divisions that were available. General Allenby had estimated that 20 British divisions (500,000 men) would be required to take Jerusalem. What had finally happened was that only 20,000 Turkish rifles had opposed our 100,000 rifles. In addition, the
Turkish transport had completely broken down; there was no coal for the railways, and there were no horses and no mules to enable the Turks to get their guns away. If, therefore, it were true that the Turks were in no position to fight, it would be criminal on our part not to take full advantage of the conditions existing in the Turkish forces.

The Director of Military Operations reported that the division which was being moved from Mesopotamia to Egypt might be ready within six weeks or two months. He said that information now being received from prisoners was to the effect that the establishment of the Turkish divisions was much lower than we originally thought. In Syria there was no system of Secret Service possible, comparable with that on the Western front, because, owing to the nature of the country, we could not get information before it was too stale to be of use.

The War Cabinet were strongly of opinion that it would be well to get General Allenby's views as to the question of exploiting his recent victory.

After some discussion the War Cabinet requested—

The Secretary of State for War to telegraph to General Allenby in the following sense:

"In view of the change in position created by your recent victory over Turks, and by revised information as to enemy strength and breakdown in his transport, War Cabinet would like to have your opinion by telegram as soon as possible as to manner in which, and extent to which, it is possible to exploit your success in Palestine with forces now under your command, plus the division under orders for Mesopotamia."

The War Cabinet asked—

The Secretary of State for War to send a message of congratulation to General Allenby on his fine achievement in capturing Jerusalem.

With reference to War Cabinet 277, Minute 6, the War Cabinet had before them the text of the proclamation prepared by Lord Curzon, in conjunction with Sir Mark Sykes (Appendix)—

The Prime Minister undertook to go to the House of Commons that afternoon, and to read the proclamation there.

With reference to War Cabinet 285, Minute 4, the Director of Military Operations said that he had investigated the report about our guns being out-ranged by the Germans at Passchendaele, and had found that there was no truth in the report.

The Director of Military Operations said that General Plumer reported increased artillery activity opposite our lines. Two attempts had been made to cross the Piave, but these had failed. Slight progress had been made by the enemy on the Asiago Plateau.

The War Cabinet requested—

The Secretary of State for War to ask General Plumer to send an appreciation of the Italian position.

The First Sea Lord reported that two old Austrian battleships had been attacked by motor-boats in Trieste Harbour. One had been sunk, and the other damaged.
Archangel, 11. With reference to War Cabinet 293, Minute 9, the First
Sea Lord asked for instructions in regard to withdrawing H.M.S.
"Iphigenia" from Archangel. Having regard to the fact that it
was impossible to reinforce the "Iphigenia" the Admiralty were
anxious to withdraw the vessel, and also the Staff, as soon as possible
from Archangel to Murmansk.

The War Cabinet decided that—
H.M.S. "Iphigenia" should be withdrawn.

Naval Allied
Council.

12. The First Lord raised the question of issuing to the press
an abridged communication in regard to the Naval Allied Council.
All the Governments of the Allies had accepted the statement which
it was proposed to publish simultaneously on the 18th December.

The War Cabinet decided that—
This question should be raised again on the following day.

Explosion at
Halifax, N.S.

13. With reference to War Cabinet 295, Minute 10, the War
Cabinet decided that—

The Chancellor of the Exchequer should be asked to make a
statement in the House that afternoon, saying that a
telegram of sympathy was being sent to Ottawa, and
stating the amount of the contribution which this country
was proposing to give.

Greece: Supplies
for.

14. With reference to War Cabinet 293, Minute 7, Lord Milner asked what progress had been made in regard to the shipment of
supplies to the Greeks.

Lord Derby undertook to keep Lord Milner informed as to
despatch.

The Food
Situation.

15. With reference to War Cabinet 266, Minute 1, and War
Cabinet 285, Minute 15, the War Cabinet reviewed the present and
prospective food situation in the light of the following documents:

The Food Situation. Memorandum by Lord Rhondda (Paper G.-
180).

Shortage of Breadstuffs. Memorandum by Lord Rhondda
(Paper G.T.-2744).

Minimum Requirements of Finance for Imported Foodstuffs in
1918. Memorandum by Lord Rhondda (Paper G.T.-2778),
Minutes by Mr. Austen Chamberlain (Paper G.T.-2876).

Lord Rhondda summarised the most important features of the
situation set forth in the above memoranda. A few months ago it
was hoped to have in this country on the 31st December a six
months' reserve of wheat. That reserve had now been reduced to
one of about twenty weeks, owing to the diversion of cargo to
France and Italy. The supplies arriving from abroad at present
were only about one-half of what were being received during the same
period last year. The consumption of home-grown meat, on the other
hand, was from 15 to 20 per cent. higher than last year. The cereal
programme was threatened with disaster in two vital points:

(a) It assumed an exportable surplus from North America of
7,000,000 tons, which Mr. Hoover now put at 3,000,000
tons;

(b) There was grave danger that the Argentine surplus of
wheat and maize might be diverted elsewhere owing to
lack of money to make the necessary purchases.
There had been instances, as in the case of bacon and lard, when supplies were available in the States, but owing to want of money they were diverted from this country. A joint organisation had been set up in the United States, with Mr. Hoover as chairman, for the consideration of the demands of the Allies and the claims of the United States. Every claim for the following month's supply had to be put forward by the 15th of each month, with an assurance that both dollars and tonnage would be forthcoming. If these claims were not ready and properly supported by the 15th, the supplies for the following month would be lost. We required credits at the rate of 57,000,000 dollars a month, apart from 8,000,000 dollars required for Army supplies. The Treasury had granted only 20,000,000 dollars for December, and held out prospects of not more than from 5,000,000 to 10,000,000 dollars for January. It was essential that we should be enabled to make purchases before the 15th of this month. That day was the 12th, and the matter was thus one of extreme urgency. The long queues outside the distributing shops, to which Mr. Austen Chamberlain had drawn attention, were due to the shortage of supplies, and were directly accountable for not a little of the industrial discontent which prevailed.

Sir Robert Chalmers said that the position was one in which the sympathies of the Treasury were entirely with the Food Controller, but all the dollars available were already pooled and were being distributed by the American Board. Mr. Austen Chamberlain presided over the American Board in this country which determined the allocation to the Ministry of Food, the Ministry of Munitions, and to other claimants. They could not add to the dollars in the pool, and, indeed, the Americans were anxious to reduce rather than increase our allowance. Lord Reading had done his utmost in the United States and in Canada to obtain every dollar possible for this country.

Mr. Wintour said that he understood that the food credits had been arranged by Lord Reading, but when the Ministry of Food put forward their claims they found the credits already assigned to forward purchases for the Ministry of Munitions and to the maintenance of the exchange for other articles. In other words, priority over food had been given not only to munitions and other Government purchases, but to unessential imports.

Sir Robert Chalmers said the whole matter was one of high and grave policy, on which he thought the Cabinet would wish to have the views of the Chancellor of the Exchequer. The Chancellor of the Exchequer was at that moment engaged upon the consideration of the problem with representatives of the United States and Lord Reading.

The War Cabinet decided that—

The Prime Minister and Lord Rhondda should at once see the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the American representatives.

At a later stage the Prime Minister and Lord Rhondda returned to the War Cabinet and announced that a satisfactory arrangement had been made.

16. The War Cabinet had before them the following documents dealing with Food Production—

Memorandum by Lord Milner (Paper G.T.-2353).
Memorandum by Mr. Long (Paper G.T.-2374).
Memorandum by Mr. Munro (Paper G.T.-2430).
Memorandum by Mr. Prothero (Paper G.T.-2767).
Memorandum by Professor Leonard Hill (Paper G.T.-2827).
Memorandum by Lord Derby (Paper G.T.-2854).
Mr. Prothero said that the original programme, which contemplated the ploughing up of 3,000,000 acres of grass land, had been revised in the light of experience. The aim now was to increase the area under the plough, as compared with the 1916 area, by (a) the breaking up of 2,050,000 acres of permanent pasture, and (b) the ploughing of 645,000 acres of temporary grass, in addition to the area of temporary grass which would have been ploughed in the normal way, making a total of 2,695,000 acres to be added to the area already under crops in 1916. This figure was for England and Wales. There was still a chance of realising this programme, particularly if the labour asked for were forthcoming. In his memorandum (Paper G.T.-2767) he had asked for a total of 48,500 labourers, of whom a proportion might be women. The most important element in the labour supply was skilled ploughmen. It was no use having an increase of unskilled labour without a due proportion of skilled. Recently nearly a thousand skilled ploughmen had been supplied by the War Office on a two months' agricultural furlough from France. About 500 German prisoners had also recently been assigned for use on the land, but although the conditions laid down by the War Office for the use of these prisoners had been in some degree relaxed, they were still too stringent to allow of the farmers making the fullest use of the prisoners. Of the 8,500 skilled ploughmen required, 4,500 were needed at once, and the remaining 4,000 by the end of February. The ploughing season for this winter was nearly over.

In this connection attention was drawn to the memorandum by the Secretary of State for War (Paper G.T.-2854), dated the 4th December, in which it was stated that 2,000 expert ploughmen from France were then being distributed, and that a trade-card index for the forces at home was being compiled, with the help of which it might be possible to discover a further source of supply.

Sir Auckland Geddes said that his Department was on the lookout in various directions for skilled ploughmen. Some might be found in the home army, and a few working on munitions and on aerodromes; but he was certain that the only large pool of British skilled agricultural labour left was the army overseas. Negotiations were proceeding with a view to importing up to 20,000 Danes. Most of these would be drawn from the towns and the distributing trades, but some of them might prove to be from the land; also he thought the better use of prisoners of war should be immediately considered.

Mr. Prothero said that wherever experiments had been tried with the Danes they had been found to be good workers. A scheme had been put forward with a view to bringing over farmers from Schleswig-Holstein, but it had fallen through, partly because of shipping difficulties and partly because there were objections on account of espionage. As to the suggestion that Irishmen might be brought across, it was found that our labourers at home objected to them. The only other source was to appeal to Sir Douglas Haig for more German prisoners from behind the lines. It was found that prisoners had not shown any desire to escape from this country, particularly those who were Poles and Saxons.

Mr. Munro said that the situation in Scotland was very much the same as in England and Wales. There was a serious shortage in the supply of soldier labour, and when obtained it was often found to be of poor quality. Unless more and better soldier labour was forthcoming the programme for 1918 would be jeopardised.

The War Cabinet decided—

(a.) To resume the discussion on the following morning, when representatives of the War Office and of the Prisoners of War Committee could be present.

(b.) That Sir Auckland Geddes should expedite the arrangements for importing Danes, and should examine the question of bringing over farmers from Schleswig-Holstein.
17. Mr. Barnes and Sir Auckland Geddes were empowered by the War Cabinet to make the best terms possible in dealing with the application to piece-workers of the 12½ per cent. increase under the order issued by the Ministry of Munitions.

They were further empowered to make the best terms possible in respect of the award of Sir William Robinson regarding payment of wages and conditions of labour granted to men employed on the production of aircraft woodwork.

2, Whitehall Gardens, S.W.,
December 12, 1917.
General Sir E. H. H. Allenby, K.C.B., reports:—

Jerusalem, 2 p.m., December 11, 1917.

I ENTERED this city officially at noon to-day with a few of my staff, the commanders of the French and Italian detachments, the heads of the Picot Mission, and the Military Attachés of France, Italy, and the United States of America. The procession was all on foot. At the Jaffa gate I was received by guards representing England, Scotland, Ireland, Wales, Australia, New Zealand, India, France, and Italy.

The population received me well.

Guards have been placed over the Holy Places.

My Military Governor is in touch with the acting Custos of the Latins, and the Greek representative has been detailed to supervise Christian Holy Places.

The Mosque of Omar and the area round it has been placed under Moslem control, and a military cordon composed of Indian Mahommedan officers and soldiers has been established round the mosque. Orders have been issued that no non-Moslem is to pass this cordon without permission of the Military Governor and the Moslem in charge of the mosque.

The following proclamation was read in my presence to the population in Arabic, Hebrew, English, French, Italian, Greek, and Russian from the steps of the Citadel, and has been posted on the walls:—

"Proclamation of Martial Law in Jerusalem.
"To the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Blessed and the people dwelling in its vicinity.
"The defeat inflicted upon the Turks by the troops under my command has resulted in the occupation of your city by my forces. I therefore here and now proclaim it to be under martial law, under which form of administration it will remain so long as military considerations make it necessary.
"However, lest any of you should be alarmed by reason of your experience at the hands of the enemy who has retired, I hereby inform you that it is my desire that every person should pursue his lawful business without fear of interruption. Furthermore, since your city is regarded with affection by the adherents of three of the great religions of mankind, and its soil has been consecrated by the prayers and pilgrimages of multitudes of devout people of these three religions for many centuries, therefore do I make known to you that every sacred building, monument, holy spot, shrine, traditional site, endowment, pious bequest, or customary place of prayer, of whatever form of the three religions, will be maintained and protected according to the existing customs and beliefs of those to whose faiths they are sacred.
"Guardians have been established at Bethlehem and on Rachel's tomb. The tomb at Hebron has been placed under exclusive Moslem control.
"The hereditary custodians of the Wakf at the gates of the Holy Sepulchre have been requested to take up their accustomed duties in remembrance of the magnanimous act of the Caliph Omar, who protected that church."