WAR CABINET, 298.

Minutes of a Meeting of the War Cabinet held at 10, Downing Street, S.W., on Friday, December 14, 1917, at 11 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.
Lieutenant-General the Right Hon. J. C. Smuts, K.C.

The following were also present:

Admiral Sir J. R. Jellicoe, G.C.B., C.M., G.C.V.O., First Sea Lord and Chief of the Naval Staff (for Minutes 10 to 15).


Mr. P. Lloyd George, Ministry of National Service (for Minute 19).

Mr. F. G. Kellaway, M.P., Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Munitions (for Minute 19).

The Right Hon. H. A. L. Fisher, LL.D., M.P., President, Board of Education (for Minute 1).


The Right Hon. the Marquess of Salisbury, K.G., G.C.V.O., C.B. (for Minute 3).

Major-General Sir G. M. W. Macdonogh, K.C.M.G., C.B., Director of Military Intelligence (for Minutes 6 to 12).


The Right Hon. C. Addison, M.D., M.P., Minister of Reconstruction (for Minute 3).

The Right Hon. R. Munro, K.C., M.P., Secretary for Scotland (for Minute 1).

Sir J. Struthers, K.C.B., LL.D., Scotch Education Department (for Minute 1).

The Right Hon. G. H. Roberts, M.P., Minister of Labour (for Minute 19).

Sir D. J. Shackleton, K.C.B., Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Labour (for Minute 19).

Mr. H. C. M. Lambert, C.B., Colonial Office (for Minute 19).

Mr. I. C. Gibbon, Local Government Board (for Minute 18).

Mr. Thomas Jones, Assistant Secretary.
Colonel E. D. Swinton, C.B., D.S.O., Assistant Secretary.
Fleet Paymaster P. H. Row, R.N., Assistant Secretary.
Sir Mark Sykes, Assistant Secretary.
1. THE Secretary for Scotland brought up for the approval of the War Cabinet the Education (Scotland) Bill, 1917, as explained by his Memorandum (Paper G.T.-2318), and pointed out the importance and urgency of the question.

The President of the Board of Education explained that the passing of this Bill would much help educational reform in England.

The War Cabinet approved the Bill.

The American Board.

2. The Secretary submitted for approval a request from Mr. Austen Chamberlain that Lord Buckmaster, who had been appointed a member of the Inter-Allied Council (War Cabinet Minute 239) should also be appointed a member of the American Board.

This proposal was approved by the War Cabinet.

Post-War Disposal of Government Property.

3. The War Cabinet had before them a Memorandum by the Minister of Reconstruction (Paper G.T.-2888) regarding the publication of a letter from him to the Chairman of the Advisory Committee on the post-war disposal of Government property.

The War Cabinet agreed to the subject matter contained in the letter, but it was pointed out that its publication might be undesirable, owing to the wrong impression that might be given as to the views of the Government on a speedy ending to the war.

It was also pointed out that the Dominions were anxious to be permitted to acquire, if they wished so to do, property accumulated by the Government during the war.

The War Cabinet approved the letter, subject to the addition of a sentence which would ensure that the information it contained should be made available to the Dominions.

The War Cabinet decided that—

(a) The letter should not be made public.
(b) The authorities should be notified when Lord Salisbury's Committee found it advisable.

For Minute 3 (c) substitute:

Questions arising from time to time which affect Treasury considerations should be referred to and determined by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Minister of Reconstruction and the Chairman of the Advisory Committee.

In reply to a question of Lord Salisbury's he was informed that the property concerned included that owned by the British Government in France as well as in the British Isles, and property which may become surplus during, as well as on the termination of, the war.

The Zionist Movement.

4. The War Cabinet received a deputation, under the leadership of Lord Rothschild, conveying the thanks of the representatives of the Zionist movement for the message of goodwill sent by the Government to the Jewish people, and congratulating the Government on the fall of Jerusalem.

Palestinian and Syrian Arabs in England: Deputation.

5. The War Cabinet received a deputation, under the leadership of Count Zoghed, on behalf of the Palestinian and Syrian Arabs in England (Moslem and Christian). Count Zoghed read out a message of congratulation to His Majesty, the British
The "Western Front"

6. The Director of Military Intelligence stated that no news had come in from the Western front, but that the Military Attache in Petrograd reported that the Germans were moving the greater part of their heavy artillery from the Eastern front to the West.

The Invasion of Italy.

7. The Director of Military Intelligence reported that the enemy had made a heavy attack on the Brenta-Piave section of the Italian front; that the Italians had been forced to evacuate certain advanced portions of their line, but had retaken them. On the section of the line held by the French, and near Colberetta, the enemy had forced the Italians to withdraw from certain advanced posts, but they were holding their own well on the whole.

Salonica.

8. The Director of Military Intelligence reported that there was a movement of Bulgarian troops towards the lakes, six battalions having appeared as reinforcements to the west of Lake Ochrida. This might be done for two purposes—

(a.) To release Austrian troops to attack Valona.
(b.) In order to establish claims on territory in Albania.

Palestine.

9. The Director of Military Intelligence reported that a slight advance had been made by one of the British divisions.

Russia

10. The Director of Military Intelligence read a telegram from General Knox, at Petrograd, giving a summary of the conditions proposed by the Germans for an armistice with the Russians. These conditions, which amounted to eleven in number, had been refused by the Russian delegation, but General Knox was of opinion that something of the sort would eventually be accepted by the Russians.

The Director of Military Intelligence reported that he had heard from Tiflis that it was proposed to form a Federation of Cossacks willing to continue the struggle against the Central Powers, if money and equipment were furnished, and referred the matter for the decision of the War Cabinet. He explained that there had been a tendency in one quarter to lay the blame on the War Office for the lack of financial assistance furnished by General Shore.

It was pointed out that Sir Charles Marling had accepted responsibility for any financial outlay that might be incurred in that quarter (telegram No. 438, dated the 13th December, 1917); that the subject of financial support for this Federation was really separate from that for the Caucasus; and that there was some danger, if care were not taken, of support being given to different separate organisations which had varying, if not actually hostile, views. The Director of Military Intelligence explained that the War Cabinet had already approved of advances of ten millions to the Ukraine, and to General Kaledin, and of financial assistance being given to the Armenians.

The War Cabinet decided that—

Any sum of money, required for the purpose of maintaining alive in South-East Russia the resistance to the Central
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The President of the Board of Education explained that the passing of this Bill would much help educational reform in England.

The War Cabinet approved the Bill.

2. The Secretary submitted for approval a request from Mr. Austen Chamberlain that Lord Buckmaster, who had been appointed a member of the Inter-Allied Council (War Cabinet Minute 839) should also be appointed a member of the American Board.

This proposal was approved by the War Cabinet.

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The War Cabinet approved the letter, subject to the addition of a sentence which would ensure that the information it contained should be made available to the Dominions.

The War Cabinet decided that—

(a.) The letter should not be made public.

(b.) The authorities should be notified when Lord Salisbury's Committee found it advisable.

(c.) The exact form of the letter should be settled between the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Minister of Munitions, and the Chairman of the Advisory Committee, so that the Treasury should be instructed on the necessary lines of control.

(d.) Government factories and shipping should be treated as a separate subject, after consideration by experts, and proposals be submitted later by the Minister of Reconstruction.

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The War Cabinet decided that—

Any sum of money, required for the purpose of maintaining alive in South-East Russia the resistance to the Central Government, and the British Forces on the capture of Jerusalem (Appendix I).

The War Cabinet authorised an announcement of the reception of the deputations to be made in the press.
Powers, considered necessary by the War Office, in consultation with the Foreign Office, should be furnished; the money to be paid in instalments so long as the recipients continued the struggle.

Roumania.

11. The attention of the War Cabinet was called to telegram No. 759 from Sir G. Bacley, reporting the prevalence of a more hopeful feeling in Roumania, and suggesting that financial support should be promised.

Armenia.

12. With reference to War Cabinet 294, Minute 14, the Director of Military Intelligence stated that he had communicated the decision of the War Cabinet promising assistance to the Armenians, and had received from General Shore a telegram to the effect that the Armenian fraternity had collected a sum of between 5 and 10 million roubles, and giving figures for the cost of mobilising 20,000 men and maintaining 40,000 men for three months. The Director of Military Intelligence stated that the most valuable help in this part of the world might be expected from the Armenians, who had every reason to fight to the bitter end.

The War Cabinet decided that—

Sir C. Marling should be authorised to open a credit at once to help the Armenians

The Director of Military Intelligence undertook to make the necessary arrangements.

Losses of Airships.

13. The First Sea Lord reported the following losses of British airships—

(a.) One destroyed by an enemy seaplane or aeroplane off the Swart Bank.
(b.) One wrecked off St. Abbs.
(c.) One landed at Rotterdam, owing to engine failure.

Bombing of Berlin-Constantinople Railway.

14. The First Sea Lord reported that on the 12th December the Berlin-Constantinople Railway was attacked by aircraft, trains being bombed and fired into by machine-guns.

Scandinavian Convoy.

15. With reference to War Cabinet 297, Minute 22, the First Sea Lord reported that no definite information had yet been received as to the fate of the merchant-ships that composed the Scandinavian convoy referred to therein, but it was stated in a telegram from Christiania that they had been sunk, as well as two of the German destroyers. The Germans had as yet not issued any communiqué on the subject, and we should not get definite information from British sources until our cruisers returned to harbour, which would probably be on the following morning. Information had just been received to the effect that the Norwegian Government had authorised the departure of H.M.S. "Pellew."

The First Sea Lord undertook to issue as full a communiqué as possible not later than Saturday, the 15th December.

Palestine.

16. The Secretary read to the War Cabinet a telegram from General Allenby, thanking the Government, on behalf of himself and the forces under his command, for the telegram of appreciation that had been sent to him, in accordance with the provisions of War Cabinet 296, Minute 6.

The War Cabinet authorised its publication in the press.
Titles of Officers of the Air Force.

17. The War Cabinet had under consideration a Memorandum (Paper G.T.-2782) by General Smuts, as to the rank and titles of officers of the Air Force.

General Smuts explained that the Air Board had suggested a mixture of naval and military titles. The Admiralty, however, were averse to this, and suggested military titles only, or fabricated titles suggestive of the air. The War Office thought that the titles should be distinct from those which appertain either to the navy or the army, and further objected to the Air Board's proposal, on the ground that it gave the naval titles to senior officers, and military titles to junior officers, which would be liable to cause resentment.

The War Cabinet decided that—

The officers of the Air Force should receive military titles.

Payment of Conscientious Objectors.

18. The War Cabinet had before them the following Papers:—

Memorandum by Mr. Illingworth (Paper G.T.-2708).
Memorandum by the Chancellor of the Exchequer (Paper G.T.-2790).
Memorandum by Mr. Hayes Fisher (Paper G.T.-2938).

The Postmaster-General said that according to the Treasury circular of the 10th February, 1917, conscientious objectors exempted by Tribunals and allowed to remain on their civil duties, should receive only their former actual rate of remuneration, without increment, or the rate which would be paid to a temporary substitute performing the duty, whichever was less, and their service should not count for pension or increment. About 100 persons retained by the Post Office were affected. These men had taken advantage of their statutory rights, and were legally exempted from military service; they were retained in the Post Office as doing work of national importance only on the recommendation of the Tribunal concerned. If their wages were reduced the Trades Unions would claim that they were being sweated. The difficulty of enforcing penalties now was aggravated by the lapse of time, as some of the men concerned had been receiving full pay for nearly 18 months. All the men were skilled, and it would be very difficult to replace them. He did not think a strike would break out on this issue, but an adverse decision would certainly tend to increase labour difficulties throughout the Service.

The War Cabinet considered two courses which were open to them if the question were raised in the House of Commons. On the one hand, if the policy of the Postmaster-General were adopted it could be admitted that these men had been overlooked, that they had been for eighteen months in receipt of ordinary pay, and that to reduce their pay or dismiss them now would savour of petty persecution. On the other hand, if the Treasury circular were enforced it could be pointed out that it was unfair to give these men preferential treatment when similar conscientious objectors in other departments were suffering disabilities.

The War Cabinet decided that—

The Postmaster-General should give notice to terminate the present arrangement at the end of the year, when the terms of the Treasury Circular of the 10th February, 1917, should be put into force.
Sir David Shackleton stated that the decision given by the Cabinet on the 22nd June, 1917, did not cover the recruiting and importation of workmen of British nationality from the Dominions, Colonies, or elsewhere abroad. At the present time labour was being imported from the Dominions by several Departments, and it was desirable that, as in the case of alien labour, there should be no possibility of competition or duplication as between Government Departments.

Mr. Lambert said that the only caveat Mr. Long wished to put in was that if any fresh field was to be opened up it was most important that application should be made to the Dominion or Colonial Government affected, through the Colonial Office.

Sir Auckland Geddes said it would be necessary that the agreement between the Ministry of National Service and the other Departments should be extended so as to cover labour brought in from the Dominions and Colonies. Under these agreements all prospective bulk demands for labour by Government Departments are to be notified by the Department concerned to the Ministry of National Service, which, jointly with the Ministry of Labour, prepares schemes to meet them; and any new scheme for recruiting labour from the Dominions or abroad is to be agreed between the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of National Service, the actual recruiting and transfer of such labour being carried out by the Ministry of Labour.

The War Cabinet decided that—

(a.) The Ministry of Labour should become definitely responsible for dealing with the recruiting and importation of workmen of British nationality from the Dominions and Colonies or elsewhere abroad, and a Minute should be circulated to Government Departments instructing them to consult the Ministry of Labour, at an early stage, in connection with any proposals to recruit any such labour, and informing them that the actual work of obtaining it should be entrusted to the Minister of Labour.

(b.) The agreement between the Ministry of National Service, the Ministry of Labour, and other Departments should be extended so as to embrace consultation on the importation of the labour referred to above.

2, Whitehall Gardens, S.W.,
December 14, 1917.
Your Excellency,

The delegates of the Arab members of the Syrian and Palestinian colonies in London and Manchester have begged to call on you to-day to express to your Excellency their congratulations on the victory and capture of Jerusalem.

They moreover express the desire that you should transmit to His Majesty and to His Majesty's forces their heartfelt congratulation, and the hope and the assurance that His Majesty's armies and the detachments of French and Italian contingents should continue their victorious march for the deliverance of the populations they are freeing from the despotism of Turkish rule.

And the delegates of the Arab members of the Syrian and Palestinian colonies in London request your Excellency to convey to General Allenby and to the valorous troops under his command the sincere expression of their gratitude for the sacrifices they are making to further the aims and aspirations of these populations for a lasting and hopeful establishment under the guidance and tutelage of their deliverers.