WAR CABINET, 412.

Minutes of a Meeting of the War Cabinet held at 10, Downing Street, S.W., on Wednesday, May 15, 1918, at 11 a.m.

Present:

The Prime Minister (in the Chair (for Minutes 13 to 18)).

The Right Hon. A. Benar Law, M.P. (in the Chair (for Minutes 1 to 12)).

The Right Hon. the Earl Curzon of Kedleston, K.G., G.C.S.I., G.C.I.E.

The Right Hon. G. N. Barnes, M.P.

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

The Right Hon. A. Chamberlain, M.P.

The following were also present:—

The Right Hon. A. J. Balfour, O.M., M.P., Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs (for Minutes 9 to 18).

The Right Hon. the Viscount Milner, G.C.B., G.C.M.G., Secretary of State for War (for Minutes 13 and 14).

Lieutenant-General Sir J. S. Cowans, G.C.M.G., K.C.B., M.V.O., Quarter-Master-General to the Forces (for Minutes 1 and 2).

Admiral Sir R. E. Wemyss, K.C.B., C.M.G., M.V.O., First Sea Lord and Chief of the Naval Staff (for Minutes 9 to 12).


The Right Hon. Sir G. Cave, K.C., M.P., Secretary of State for Home Affairs (for Minutes 4 and 5).

The Right Hon. C. Addison, M.D., M.P., Minister of Reconstruction (for Minutes 3 to 5).

The Right Hon. Sir A. Stanley, M.P., President of the Board of Trade (for Minute 1).

The Right Hon. R. E. Prothero, M.V.O., M.P., President of the Board of Agriculture and Fisheries (for Minutes 1 to 3).

The Right Hon. W. Hayes Fisher, M.P., President of the Local Government Board (for Minute 3).

The Right Hon. R. Munro, K.C., M.P., Secretary for Scotland (for Minute 3).

Sir J. F. Beale, K.B.E., Secretary, Wheat Commission (for Minute 1).


Paymaster-in-Chief P. H. Row, R.N., Assistant Secretary.

Mr. Thomas Jones, Assistant Secretary.

Lieutenant-Colonel L. Wilson, C.M.G., D.S.O., M.P., Assistant Secretary.
1. WITH reference to War Cabinet 402, Minute 12, the War Cabinet had before them the report on horse-racing by the President of the Board of Trade, with memoranda from the Army Council and the Ministry of Food (Paper G.T.-4518).

The War Cabinet decided—

To ask Lord Curzon, together with Mr. Prothero and Sir Albert Stanley, to meet representatives of the Jockey Club; and, subject to any representations made on behalf of the Jockey Club which Lord Curzon considered would modify them, the War Cabinet approved the recommendations set forth in the report of the President of the Board of Trade, namely: That no flat racing should be allowed, except at Newmarket, after the 1st June; that race meetings under the rules of the National Hunt Committee should not be allowed during the ensuing winter season; that no extra trains should be run to Newmarket for the conveyance of racegoers, or tickets sold to Newmarket beyond the capacity of the ordinary trains.

2. The War Cabinet had before them a memorandum by the Secretary of State for War dealing with a suggestion to substitute horseflesh for beef and mutton in the rations issued to enemy prisoners of war in this country (Paper G.T.-4515).

The attention of the War Cabinet was drawn to the difficulty of obtaining adequate meat supplies during the next few months, and to the desirability of using horseflesh for sausage, unless there were statutory objections.

The War Cabinet were of opinion that there was no serious objection to the issue of horseflesh to enemy prisoners of war, and decided—

To leave the matter to the Secretary of State for War to take what course he thought fit.

3. The War Cabinet had before them the following documents with regard to the provision of land for soldiers on demobilisation:

Memorandum by Mr. Prothero (Paper G.T.-2225).
Memorandum by the Minister of Reconstruction (Paper G.T.-4479).
Memorandum by the President of the Board of Agriculture and Fisheries (Paper G.T.-4481).
Joint Memorandum by the above (Paper G.T.-4494).
Note by the Minister of Reconstruction covering resolutions of Advisory Council, Section IV (Paper G.T.-4485).

Mr. Prothero explained that in his memorandum dated the 2nd October, 1917 (Paper G.T.-2225), he had not proposed to resort to compulsory acquisition of land except in the case of certain glebe lands. He had proposed to begin by appointing a commissioner, who would privately approach the larger landowners of the country and ask each of them to have a survey made of his estate, and to report what portions, large or small, he would be prepared to cut off and dispose of to the Board of Agriculture and Fisheries for land settlement. Similar negotiations might be opened up with representatives of colleges and hospitals. He had also suggested in the same memorandum that (if necessary with the aid of legislation) the Board should be empowered to enter into agreements with landowners for the extinction of existing tithe-rent charge upon their land by exchange for a proportionate amount of land. Since writing the memorandum referred to, as the result of further consideration, he had agreed that, for certain limited purposes, it
might be desirable to have compulsory powers; and the proposals on which he and the Minister of Reconstruction were agreed had been set forth in their joint memorandum (Paper G.T.-4494), where, \textit{inter alia}, the sanction of the Cabinet was asked to proposals—

\begin{enumerate}
\item To acquire compulsory any land needed for land settlement, demonstration and experiment, afforestation and reclamation, and the development of rural industries.
\item To acquire by voluntary agreement adjoining land needed in connection with, though not directly for, the specified purposes.
\end{enumerate}

The compulsory powers, it was suggested, should be limited for the purpose of—

\begin{enumerate}
\item Carrying out schemes of land settlement and the development of rural industries.
\item Promoting and extending forestry.
\item Reclaiming waste land.
\item Providing for housing accommodation connected with any of the foregoing objects.
\end{enumerate}

Dr. Addison stated that an objection to the policy originally suggested by the Board of Agriculture and Fisheries was that it singled out glebe lands for special treatment, and that this might lead to much undesirable controversy. He felt that it was better not to single out one form of land. It should be borne in mind that the taking of compulsory powers did not exclude negotiations on a voluntary basis. On the other hand, experience showed that it would not be easy to obtain the large amount of land which might be required without resort to compulsion. He laid special stress on the limitations on compulsory action set forth in section 9 of the joint memorandum (Paper G.T.-4494).

Lord Curzon thought that the proposals before the Cabinet were of a serious character, and stated that it was essential, if the Bill embodying them were not to come to grief in the House of Lords, that any objections to them by the landed interest should be carefully weighed in advance.

Mr. Chamberlain suggested that the policy under consideration required careful and detailed examination, and he thought that could best be given by a Cabinet Committee.

The Secretary for Scotland stated that he had not had an opportunity of discussing the proposals with the Board of Agriculture for Scotland, and was not therefore able to offer a considered opinion upon them.

The War Cabinet decided that—

The matter, including the proposals contained in Paper G.T.-4479 on the acquisition of land for small holdings, should be referred to the following Committee:

Sir George Cave (Chairman),
Mr. Prothero,
Mr. Munro,
Dr. Addison,
Mr. Hayes Fisher,
Mr. Walter Long, and
A Representative of the Treasury,

the Chairman to have power to add further members to the Committee, and, if Mr. Long should be unable to serve, to arrange for a representative of the landed interest in Mr. Long's place.
Parliamentary Procedure.


5. With reference to War Cabinet 324, Minute 14, the War Cabinet had before them a memorandum by the Minister of Reconstruction (Paper G.T.-3090), and a memorandum by the Minister of Reconstruction covering a report of Sir George Cave's Conference on the subject of Parliamentary Procedure (Paper G.T.-4432).

Sir George Cave said that he had presided over a conference to consider what steps should be taken to deal at short notice with emergency measures, which, in the absence of legislation to the contrary, would lapse either on the termination of the war or at various periods thereafter. The Conference was of opinion that the best method of procedure would be the appointment of a Select Committee of the House of Commons to consider and report as to the steps to be taken. This course would have the advantage of preparing the ground, and of anticipating discussion in the House. If a Bill were introduced without such preliminary preparation there would be certain to be a large number of amendments. It might be possible to have a Bill which would leave it to be settled by Order in Council as to what was meant by "end of the war," and to extend or shorten the period as might be required in each case.

Dr. Addison said that there were a large number of Acts and Regulations in which the phrase "end of the war," or variations of it, occurred, and it was necessary to come to some clear understanding for extending or shortening the period of operation of such statutes and any regulations made thereunder.

Mr. Chamberlain suggested that it might be preferable to have a Joint Committee of the two Houses rather than a Select Committee of the House of Commons. He thought that a Joint Committee could be set up by resolution, and that a Bill would not be necessary.

The War Cabinet decided that—

(a.) Provided no Act of Parliament were required, a Joint Committee of both Houses should be set up, to consider and report as to the steps to be taken to deal with emergency war measures; but if an Act were required, then a Select Committee of the House of Commons alone should be set up. The necessary action should be initiated by the Secretary of State for Home Affairs.

(b.) The Departments concerned should furnish to the Minister of Reconstruction as soon as possible information as to legislation which they may desire to be prolonged.

6. With reference to War Cabinet 308, Minute 15, the War Cabinet took note of a memorandum by the Conciliation and Arbitration Board in relation to claims for 12\% per cent. bonus, and they approved the steps taken by Mr. Barnes in the matter.

7. With reference to War Cabinet 308, Minute 17, the War Cabinet had before them the Interim Report of Sir Walter Phillimore's Committee on the League of Nations (Paper G.T.-4454).

Lord Curzon stated that the House of Lords debate on the subject had been adjourned in response to a request from Lord Parmoor, who thought that it was not appropriate to discuss
the matter while the German offensive was proceeding, and similar representations had been made by the Lord Chancellor. Lord Curzon agreed that it was rather academic to discuss the matter at present, but thought that it was not improbable that a question would be put in connection with the Report of the Foreign Office Committee. No public reference had yet been made to the existence of the Committee. He was in favour of delaying discussion of the subject, especially as it might come before the Imperial War Cabinet.

The War Cabinet decided that—

(a.) Subject to the approval of the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and the Secretary of State for the Colonies, copies of the Report should be sent confidentially to President Wilson and the Dominion Premiers, it being made clear that the Report did not set forth the policy of the Government but was the result of the deliberations of an expert Committee.

(b.) The subject of the League of Nations should be considered at the forthcoming Session of the Imperial War Cabinet.

Propaganda in Ireland.

8. With reference to War Cabinet 398, Minute 10, calling attention to the entire absence of an organised system of propaganda in Ireland, the War Cabinet had before them a note by the Secretary (Paper G.T.-4540), which raised the question whether the Ministry of Information should extend its propaganda activities to Ireland.

The War Cabinet referred the question to Mr. Long for decision, in consultation with the Minister of Information and the Chief Secretary for Ireland.

Submarines.

9. The First Sea Lord informed the Cabinet that—

(a.) The British submarine "E. 35" reported having torpedoed and sunk in the Atlantic, West of Gibraltar, on 11th May, a German submarine cruiser.

(b.) The transport "Nidd" rammed a submarine just off the Royal Sovereign Lightship, after which the submarine appeared on the surface in a sinking condition.

The Adriatic:
Bombing Attacks on Durazzo.

10. The First Sea Lord informed the War Cabinet that four British de Haviland machines had carried out a bombing attack on Durazzo on 13th May, bombs being dropped on a seaplane and on headquarters. In the afternoon of the same day six Italian seaplanes also bombed Durazzo. All machines had returned.

The Naval Raid on Zeebrugge.

11. With reference to War Cabinet 407, Minute 3, the First Sea Lord stated that, as the result of an air reconnaissance, four destroyers were seen alongside the mole at Zeebrugge, and that a dredger was between the block ships. Two large submarines were alongside the North Quay, Darse I.

The Naval Raid on Ostend.

12. With reference to War Cabinet 409, Minute 5, as regards the "Vindictive," the First Sea Lord informed the War Cabinet that the Germans had opened the sluice-gates, thus setting free a large body of water, and in consequence the position of the "Vindictive" had somewhat shifted. As far as was known, no submarines had, since the "Vindictive" was sunk, used Ostend.
13. With reference to War Cabinet 410, Minute 14, the Prime Minister stated that, as a result of his visit to the War Office that morning, he had learned that there was no doubt that American troops were coming over in considerable numbers at the present time, and that 40,000 were now in France and 20,000 to 30,000 on the high seas. As regards these numbers it would be necessary, however, to consult Field-Marshal Sir Douglas Haig as to when they would be ready to be placed in the firing line. General Hutchinson, who had just returned from the United States, had expressed himself confident that the supply would be kept up until next July, when there might be a slackening as regards the number of men to be transported. As regards the personnel, General Hutchinson had formed the opinion that, although the younger officers were not at present very good, the men were excellent. He was further of opinion that there was a want of higher organisation in the United States as regards military matters.

The Prime Minister drew attention to the delay that was taking place as regards the supply of artillery, and instanced the case of the time that had been wasted owing to the Americans being determined to adopt guns of their own instead of availing themselves of either French or British guns. He added that the original idea of the Americans with regard to the creation of their army was only to call up 50,000 men a month. They had since increased that number to 250,000, and were aware of the fact that they could still further increase it to 450,000; but the organisation of their resources was such that they were not in a position to clothe and give rifles to the larger number and, consequently, were not prepared to encourage public criticism by making a greater effort. The Prime Minister was of opinion that it was highly desirable that we should get together criticisms of their methods, in so far as they could be improved upon in furthering the prosecution of the war, so that the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs could send the same to Colonel House for such action as he thought best.

This led to the expression of the opinion that Colonel House would be of far greater assistance here to the Allied cause than he would be in America, it being pointed out that Lord Reading had acquired so much influence in the States that the presence of Colonel House could be far better spared from that country now than in the past.

It was pointed out that it was highly desirable that, if possible, Colonel House should be present at the next meeting of the Supreme War Council, which would be held during the first week in June.

The War Cabinet requested—

The Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs to go into the question of American representation in Europe, and to take such action as regards Colonel House as they might think desirable.

14. The War Cabinet approved the following arrangements for co-ordinating all British Missions in France:

(a.) All British Missions in France are to be notified by the respective Government Departments in England under which they serve that Lord Derby will act as Head of all British Missions in the same way as Lord Reading does in Washington.

(b.) Lord Derby will have no executive authority in regard to such Missions, but is to be kept fully informed of any matters which require adjustment with the French Government.

(c.) All communications are to pass, as heretofore, direct between the Missions and the Departments at home with which they are connected.
(d.) In the event of any member of a Mission requiring to see one of the principal members of the French Government, i.e., any Minister superior to an Under-Secretary, on any matter other than that relating to purely departmental routine, he is to notify to Lord Derby his intention of doing so, the object for which the interview is sought, and the result of the interview. In cases where the intervention of one of the principal members of the French Government is concerned, the Head of the Mission should consult with Lord Derby as to whether it is desirable that he should attend the interview on behalf of His Majesty's Government.

(e.) In the event of visits by French Ministers to London, the Department concerned should notify Lord Derby, through the Foreign Office, giving the name of the Minister and the object of his visit. The reason for this is that in many cases several Departments may be concerned, and it would be possible for Lord Derby to assemble the Heads of the respective Missions together, and to draw up a joint memorandum of information on the subject which would be useful to the British Ministers concerned when seeing the French Ministers.

(f.) Lord Derby has arranged to hold a weekly meeting of the Heads of the principal British Missions now in Paris. Although the British Military Representative and his Staff at Versailles do not come under this scheme, General Sackville-West is authorised either to be present or to send a representative to the weekly meetings.

Food Production in 1919.

With reference to memoranda by the President of the Board of Agriculture and Fisheries (Paper G.T.-4409), and a memorandum by the Food Controller (Paper G.T.-4499), relative to the possibilities of food production in 1919, the War Cabinet directed—

The Secretary to place this matter on the Agenda for Wednesday, the 22nd May, for their consideration.

Austria: Emperor Karl's Letter.

16. With reference to War Cabinet 411, Minute 25, a discussion arose with regard to the debate which was to take place in the House of Commons on the following day, on the adjournment, upon the questions which were to be raised on the subject of the Emperor Karl's letter.

The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs said that he would reply to the debate, but that he could only deal with the question on broad lines.

The Prime Minister said that he was quite willing to take part in the debate, if it were necessary, but that he could only say that information was given to him in the strictest secrecy, that he had accepted these conditions, and that it would be impossible for him to divulge the information until he had been absolved from his promise of secrecy.

The War Cabinet decided that—

The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs should reply to the debate.

The Prime Minister agreed to be in the House of Commons so as to be available to take part, if necessary.
Ireland:
Status of Chief Secretary.

17. With reference to War Cabinet 408A, Minute 1, attention was drawn to a question which was to be asked in the House of Commons that afternoon by Mr. Herbert Samuel as to whether any change was contemplated in the status of the Chief Secretary and the Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland, or in his functions in the Government of Ireland.

A general discussion ensued, in which it was pointed out that Lord French and Mr. Shortt were occupying similar positions to those occupied by Lord Spencer and Mr. Trevelyan, who, while holding respectively the positions of Viceroy and Chief Secretary, both had seats in the Cabinet.

The War Cabinet decided that—

The Chancellor of the Exchequer should reply to Mr. Herbert Samuel to the effect that there was no change in the status of the Chief Secretary, but that the condition of affairs in Ireland entailed additional responsibilities on the Viceroy.

Ireland.

18. With reference to War Cabinet 408A, Minute 1, the Secretary of State for the Colonies informed the War Cabinet that he had been in telephonic communication with Field-Marshal Lord French, who was anxious to know if the War Cabinet would approve of the Proclamation referred to in War Cabinet 408A, Minute 2, being issued as it was originally drafted. This proposal would rescind the decision of the War Cabinet that the Proclamation should be issued in two parts, the first dealing with crime and the second with voluntary recruiting. Mr. Long said that he had asked Lord French if he had considered the desirability of a simultaneous publication of the two Proclamations, and Lord French had informed him that the legal advisers of the Irish Government were strongly averse to such a course. Lord French had been unable over the telephone to give reasons for this advice, but had said that he attached great importance to it, that the Irish Government considered the situation very dangerous, and that he must ask the War Cabinet to support the Irish Government. Mr. Long pointed out that the late Irish Government held the opinion that the War Cabinet had not sufficiently supported them in their efforts to preserve order in Ireland, and that even the Attorney-General for Ireland had lately told him that he had always done his best, but that he had invariably been impeded from England.

Mr. Long had pointed out that this was quite incorrect. He reminded the War Cabinet of their promises and asked them to give the new Government of Ireland their support and to trust them.

The Prime Minister confirmed Mr. Long's view that the statement as to the non-support of the late Irish Government was wholly incorrect, and that to his knowledge the Cabinet had never overruled any proposals to this end made by the late Chief Secretary.

Lord Curzon expressed an opinion in favour of the Proclamation being issued as originally drafted. Not only did he consider it desirable that this should be done in order to support the Lord-Lieutenant as Head of the Irish Government, but also from his knowledge of the facts of the situation which had been laid before the War Cabinet.

A discussion ensued as to the policy of the Government with regard to the enforcement of the Military Service Act on Ireland and the proposals for Home Rule. It was pointed out that if the Government decided to appeal to the Irish to provide sufficient recruits by voluntary methods, it would be undesirable to proceed at present with the introduction into the House of Commons of a Home Rule Bill.

In this connexion Mr. Long said that he had had a long talk with General Sir Bryan Mahon, who was a strict Roman Catholic, and that General Mahon had informed him that he was certain there
would be a considerable flow of Irishmen to the Colours from South Ireland if the War Office were prepared to keep Irishmen in Irish units. Mr. Long said that Sir B. Mahon had informed him that the War Office were not prepared to do this, but that he (Mr. Long) hoped that he would be able, in conjunction with the Adjutant-General, to work out a plan for the enlistment of men in Ireland which would be satisfactory to them. Mr. Long also said that many Irishmen had told him that, if a large number of volunteers were obtained from Ireland, the relatives of those who had gone would be advocates of conscription.

Mr. Chamberlain said that there was strong reason to appeal for voluntary recruits at the present time, as the Government had precluded itself by its pledges from putting conscription into force for the present, and that therefore the present time should be used to the best advantage. He did not agree that the time used in this way meant the abandonment of the Government's policy.

The War Cabinet decided that—

The Secretary of State for the Colonies should inform the Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland that the War Cabinet had rescinded the decision arrived at in War Cabinet 408 A, Minute 2, and that approval was given for the issue of the original Proclamation dealing with the present situation in Ireland as read in draft by Mr. Long on the previous occasion when this question was discussed.

2, Whitehall Gardens, S.W.,
May 15, 1918.