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SECRET.

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WAR CABINET, 433.

Minutes of a Meeting of the War Cabinet held in the Chancellor of the Exchequer's Room in the House of Commons on Wednesday, June 19, 1918, at 7 P.M.

Present :

The PRIME MINISTER (*in the Chair*).

The Right Hon. the LORD CURZON of KEDLESTON, K.G., G.C.S.I., G.C.I.E. The Right Hon. G. N. BARNES, M.P. The Right Hon. A. BONAR LAW, M.P.	Lieutenant-General the Right Hon. J. C. SMUTS, K.C. The Right Hon. A. CHAMBERLAIN, M.P.
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The following were also present :—

The Right Hon. A. J. BALFOUR, O.M., M.P., Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs. The Right Hon. W. LONG, M.P., Secretary of State for the Colonies. The Right Hon. H. A. L. FISHER, LL.D., M.P., President, Board of Education. Professor W. G. ADAMS.	The Right Hon. C. ADDISON, M.D., M.P., Minister of Reconstruction. The Right Hon. SIR A. C. GEDDES, K.C.B., M.P., Minister of National Service. The Right Hon. E. SHORTT, K.C., M.P., Chief Secretary for Ireland. The Right Hon. Sir GORDON HEWART, K.C., M.P., Solicitor-General.
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Lieutenant-Colonel SIR M. P. A. HANKEY, K.C.B., *Secretary*.

Mr. THOMAS JONES, *Assistant Secretary*.

Enlistment of
Irishmen in the
French Army.

1. THE War Cabinet had before them a letter from the French Chargé d'Affaires to Lord Hardinge, under cover of a note by Mr. Balfour, together with correspondence between Lord Milner and Lord Hardinge, with regard to the possible enlistment of Irishmen in the French army (Paper G.T.-4808).

The War Cabinet were agreed that while, from the point of view of man-power, it would be desirable to allow Irishmen to enlist in the French army, either in a special Irish Brigade or in the Foreign Legion, there were, on the other hand, weighty political objections to the proposal.

The War Cabinet decided that—

M. de Fleuriiau should be informed that no objection would be raised if such Irishmen as privately offered themselves were enlisted.

Ireland :
Home Rule Bill
and Conscription.

2. With reference to War Cabinet 421, Minute 6, the War Cabinet had before them the following documents :—

- Interim Report of the Committee on Government of Ireland Bill (Paper G.T.-4839) ;
- Memoranda by Mr. Long (Papers G.T.-4728 and 4882) ;
- Memorandum by Mr. Chamberlain on the Irish Question and Federalism (Paper G.-212).

Lord Curzon stated that in the House of Lords on the following day the policy of the Government in relation to Ireland would be raised, and it was necessary that he should be in a position to represent the views of the War Cabinet. He would probably be asked to explain why the Government's declared intentions of proceeding with conscription and a Home Rule Bill had not been carried out. To that question a perfectly satisfactory answer could be given on the lines set out by Mr. Long in his memoranda to the War Cabinet. But a further question would be put : granted there was good ground for not proceeding with conscription and a Home Rule Bill at present, were these measures only temporarily in abeyance, or had the Government decided to drop them indefinitely ? Reference would probably be made to the speeches delivered in April by the Prime Minister and the Leader of the House, and the Government might be charged with having departed from the policy therein laid down.

Mr. Balfour thought it should not be impossible to say that the Government had made a mistake as to the conditions in Ireland when they announced their intention of proceeding with both measures ; that they had decided, on learning how grave those conditions were, that their first duty was to restore respect for law and order in Ireland, and that until this was done it was undesirable to outline any programme for the future.

Mr. Long said that, with reference to the speeches delivered by the Prime Minister and Mr. Bonar Law, the impression left upon the House was that conscription could and would shortly be put into effect, but that the preliminary arrangements would necessarily take some time. In the meantime a Home Rule Bill would be prepared and introduced, and would go through the usual process of discussion in the two Houses. It was understood to be part of the dual policy that, if they failed to pass the Home Rule Bill, the Government would resign.

The Prime Minister said that the view of the War Cabinet on the point just mentioned by Mr. Long had been that, if conscription had been put in force and a Home Rule Bill were defeated, then the Government would resign. When this decision was reached, the War Cabinet thought that there was sufficient general agreement, although in certain quarters it might be no more than sullen assent, to carry a Home Rule measure. Since then two things had happened. The first was the discovery of a grave Sinn Fein conspiracy, in which the real leaders of Irish opinion—men like de Valera and Arthur Griffith—were involved. The programme of the conspirators was timed to coincide with a great German offensive, which would menace the existence of the British army. The second factor in the situation was the challenge to the Imperial supremacy thrown down by the Roman Catholic Church, on an issue which hitherto had always been assumed to rest solely in the sphere of the Imperial Government. It was impossible to ignore these two facts, for an essential condition of legislation in war-time was that there should be substantial agreement between the main parties in the State. Two or three months ago Liberals would have warmly welcomed a Home Rule Bill, and many Unionists would have tolerated it as a war measure, but there had been so great a change in the political climate that he did not think a Home Rule Bill could be carried now.

Mr. Barnes agreed that it was not possible to pass a Home

Rule Bill at present, and the Prime Minister's argument was conclusive on that point; but he suggested that the production of a Home Rule Bill, even if not proceeded with, would tend to improve relations with Ireland, and it would be possible to obtain Irish opinion upon it.

Sir Gordon Hewart thought the Government would be charged with insincerity if they merely produced a Bill without any serious intention of proceeding with it.

Mr. Long pointed out that many in the House of Commons had reluctantly assented to a Home Rule Bill because they understood that on that condition they could get conscription applied to Ireland; but now conscription was postponed by the action of the Cabinet, and it was, therefore, idle to go on with the Home Rule Bill. On the other hand, if voluntary recruiting proved to be a failure, the Government would be pressed as to their further intentions. Many Unionists maintained that one of the most serious defects of the British policy in Ireland was that the Irish were kept in suspense as to what that policy really was. Ireland was perhaps suffering to-day more from suspense than from anything else.

Mr. Herbert Fisher said that, if it was the intention to put conscription in force in October, then it was important that the Home Rule Bill should be ready.

The Prime Minister concurred, and pointed out that in his speech on the 9th April he had argued that it would be impossible to carry conscription without stern measures; that such stern measures could not be applied without support, not only in Ireland, but in America and in this country; and that such support could not be obtained, especially from the Labour party, without a measure of Home Rule. The Government policy had thus been: If we cannot carry Home Rule we cannot carry conscription. In explaining the action of the Government, he would assume that they stood by their policy, and would draw special attention to the recent developments in the government of Ireland. Formerly Ireland had been largely governed from London. Now Ireland was being largely governed from Dublin, and the powers of the Irish Government had been increased. The first action of the new Irish Government had been to suppress the Sinn Fein conspiracy. Then they had advised the War Cabinet to make an experiment in voluntary recruiting, and the Cabinet had accepted that advice. If he were directly challenged as to whether the Government stood by their dual policy he would reply in the affirmative, but would add that the time and method of giving effect to it must be judged by the War Cabinet.

Dr. Addison said that the difficulty in declaring that the Government stood by its policy lay in the fact that there was, as yet, no agreed Home Rule Bill, and no decision had been come to on the proposed Federal solution, which he was increasingly disposed to favour.

Mr. Chamberlain made a strong appeal in favour of the adoption of the Federal principle. Otherwise, he said, it was not possible to secure a non-contentious measure. The ground had been so often explored, and was so thoroughly well known, that every proposition in a Home Rule Bill would be controverted, and with good reason, for the Bill would be founded on no logical basis. Devolution was as important to the other parts of the United Kingdom as to Ireland, and it would, at any rate, be some advantage to have to fight on new ground. The new Bill, as at present drafted, took away a great part of the measure already on the Statute Book, and would be certain to arouse fierce opposition. The Federal principle, on the other hand, was receiving increasing support from some of the best men in all parties. It was probably true that a Federal Bill would not be acceptable to the Nationalists, but they would acquiesce in it, and at least their case for agitation would have disappeared.

The Prime Minister said that he was about to receive a deputation on the subject of Federalism, composed of Members of Parliament drawn from the different political parties, and, before coming to a decision, it would be better to hear what views were put forward, and what support they commanded. It might then be worth considering whether, in the interval, while voluntary recruiting was being tried, a Committee of the House of Commons, or a Joint Committee of both Houses, might not consider the problem of Federalism.

The War Cabinet decided that—

Lord Curzon, in his speech,

- (a.) Should proceed on the assumption that the dual policy had not been abandoned, although the Government must be the judge of the time and method of its application; and
- (b.) Should state the reasons, as set forth above, why the dual policy of the Government was for the time in abeyance.

The War Cabinet further decided—

To adjourn the consideration of Federalism until after the Prime Minister had received the deputation referred to, and the War Cabinet had had an opportunity of learning its views and the support they were likely to secure.

2, *Whitehall Gardens, S.W.*,
June 20, 1918.