SECRET.

WAR CABINET, 456.

Minutes of a Meeting of the War Cabinet, held at 10, Downing Street, S.W., on Friday, August 9, 1918, 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. G. N. BARNES, 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 1 to 7).
The Right Hon. LORD ROBERT CECIL, K.C., M.P., Assistant Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs (for Minute 11).
The Right Hon. the VISCOUNT MILNER, G.C.B., G.C.M.G., Secretary of State for War (for Minutes 1 to 9).
Major-General Sir G. M. W. MACDONOGH, K.C.M.G., C.B., Director of Military Intelligence (for Minutes 1 to 4).
Major-General R. HUTCHINSON, D.S.O., Director of Organisation (for Minute 5).
Brigadier-General B. E. W. CHILDS, C.M.G., Director of Personal Services (for Minute 5).
The Right Hon. E. SHORTT, K.C., M.P., Chief Secretary for Ireland (for Minute 5).
The Right Hon. SIR E. GEDDES, G.B.E., K.C.B., M.P., First Lord of the Admiralty (for Minutes 1 to 8).
Admiral Sir R. E. WEMYSS, G.C.B., C.M.G., M.V.O., First Sea Lord and Chief of the Naval Staff (for Minutes 1 to 3).
The Right Hon. SIR A. STANLEY, M.P., President of the Board of Trade (for Minutes 6, 7).
The Right Hon. SIR A. C. GEDDES, K.C.B., M.P., Minister of National Service (for Minute 5).
The Right Hon. J. I. MACPHERSON, M.P., Under-Secretary of State for War (for Minute 9).
SIR LEO G. CHIOZZA MONEY, M.P., Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Shipping (for Minutes 6, 7, 8).
SIR A. DURRANT, O.B.E., M.V.O., His Majesty's Office of Works (for Minutes 10, 11).

Lieutenant-Colonel W. DALLY JONES, C.M.G., Acting Secretary.
Captain L. F. BURGES, Assistant Secretary.
Lieutenant-Colonel L. STORR, Assistant Secretary.
Captain CLEMENT JONES, Assistant Secretary.
1. The Director of Military Intelligence explained by aid of a map the advance that had been made on the previous day by British and French troops to the east and south-east of Amiens. This advance was of the greatest strategic importance, as much as it helped to clear Amiens. Nine German divisions had been reported opposite the British divisions, and three German divisions opposite the French, making a total of twelve enemy divisions engaged in these operations. As regards the total number of enemy prisoners captured there appeared some uncertainty, but the Australians claimed 6,000, the Canadians 4,000, the French 3,000, and the cavalry 1,000, making a total of 14,000 in all. The Director of Military Intelligence said that general headquarters had reported the previous night as being quiet, and that up to now the Germans had made no counter-attack, although an attack by two German divisions was expected to-day north of the Somme. A satisfactory feature of the attack had been that the enemy had been completely surprised. Two German batteries had actually been captured without firing a shot. There had been very heavy air fighting, and it was claimed that thirty-seven enemy aeroplanes had been brought down.

2. The First Sea Lord reported that five D.H. bombing machines from Otranto, escorted by four camels, had attacked Durazzo on the 7th August. Eighteen 112-lb. bombs and one 230-lb. bomb had been dropped. Six direct hits had been observed on the seaplane base, and a large fire had been started, which had been seen 40 miles out to sea. All our machines had returned safely.

3. The First Sea Lord said that a telegram had been received from Christiania reporting a message from the Naval Attaché at Petrograd, dated the 7th August, 1918, to the effect that all inland and foreign telegraphic communication with the Allies was cut, and that Allied officers were forbidden to move from one town to another. Cholera was decreasing. All the Missions were safe. Reliable news had come from Sebastopol that 6,000 German bluejackets had arrived there. Crews were being trained for Russian submarines, exercise being carried out daily near that port. Russian officers, however, were refusing to give any assistance in training. The submarines would be sent to the Dardanelles as soon as the crews were sufficiently trained.

4. Mr. Chamberlain reported that, at the request of the Foreign Office, he had seen Mr. Summers, the head of the American War Mission sent by Mr. Baruch. Mr. Summers desired to discuss the development of the Inter-Allied Programme Committees, and, in particular, expressed a desire that there should be some one member of the British Government to whom he or Mr. Chandler Anderson could address themselves in case of any difficulty arising. Mr. Chamberlain had urged on Mr. Summers that American representatives should at once be appointed to all these Programme Committees, and Mr. Summers had agreed that this should be done. Mr. Chamberlain said that he was prepared, subject to the approval of the War Cabinet, to act as the representative of the British Government for the purpose asked by Mr. Summers.

The War Cabinet approved.
Ireland: Recruiting.

5. The War Cabinet had before them a letter from the Chief Secretary for Ireland (Paper G.T.-5340) in regard to recruiting in Ireland.

Mr. Shortt said that Ireland had been divided into ten districts for purposes of recruiting. The Ministry of National Service had allotted to each of these ten districts their fair quota of the 30,000 recruits asked for by the 1st October, and of the subsequent monthly numbers, as set forth in Lord French's Proclamation. Some time ago, a Conference had been held at the Ministry of National Service, at which there had been present representatives of the Irish Recruiting Council, the Ministry of National Service, the War Office, the Admiralty, and the Air Service. This Conference were agreed that it would be fair that any district which provided its quota as laid down by the Ministry of National Service, should be considered to have fulfilled the conditions set out in Lord French's Proclamation, and should not be conscripted. Mr. Shortt said that, before any public announcement to this effect could be made, he would have to obtain Cabinet sanction. He added that Lord French was in favour of the proposal now submitted.

A letter from Mr. Long, who was unavoidably prevented by illness from attending, was read, in which he expressed his approval of the proposal contained in Mr. Shortt's letter.

The Minister of National Service said that, as a result of the Proclamation, the whole position in Ireland was difficult. He was, however, more hopeful than he had been a fortnight previously. On the whole, a balance of the difficulties appeared to him to be in favour of the plan proposed by Mr. Shortt.

Mr. Shortt said that he was of opinion that if four or five of the ten districts provided their full quota, opposition to conscription in Ireland would be considerably reduced. Further, he had reason for hoping that the scheme of recruitment by districts would create a new Central Party.

Some discussion followed as to whether the scheme was likely to make the introduction of conscription later on, in the event of that becoming necessary, more difficult or less difficult, and different views were expressed as to this. The majority of opinion was in favour of adopting the proposal contained in Mr. Shortt's letter.

The War Cabinet decided therefore—

To sanction the proposal subject to the approval of the Prime Minister.

The Acting Secretary was instructed to send a copy of the Minute on this subject to the Prime Minister the same day, on account of the urgency of the matter.

Naval Effort of Great Britain and the United States of America.

6. The War Cabinet had before them a Memorandum by the First Lord of the Admiralty, in regard to the naval effort of Great Britain and the United States of America (Paper G.T.-5307). The War Cabinet, having considered this Paper, took note of the fact that, since the Paper was written, the First Lord had had an opportunity of discussing the matter with the Prime Minister, Mr. Roosevelt, the Assistant Secretary of the United States Navy Department, and with the Naval Affairs Committee of the House of Representatives, and that he had hoped, from what had passed at these later discussions, that, in so far as the American Navy—as distinguished from their Mercantile Marine—was concerned, they would be prepared to take a broader view of their contribution to the war at sea; that they would develop the building of destroyers and auxiliary craft, including escort vessels, with the object of the United States bearing a share more commensurate with their responsibilities and with the magnitude of our naval effort. This would
have the effect of releasing a certain amount of British shipbuilding capacity hypothecated to the Navy.

The War Cabinet also took note of the fact that the Board of Admiralty were at the present time considering their naval building programme in the light of the existing situation and the American effort already in course of preparation, and that they hoped that it would be possible to make a further reduction under that head in their demands upon the shipyards.

The War Cabinet, therefore, were of opinion that representations might suitably be made to the United States on the ground that the British mercantile marine losses during the war in the cause of the Allies had been extremely heavy; that the British were freely devoting their merchant ships to the service of the Allies, and very largely to America, and were incurring grave losses in that service; that, on account of the geographical position of Great Britain, a large proportion of the repair work to their own ships in Allied service—particularly American service—had to be done in British yards to the relief of American yards, and that as the American naval effort developed in European waters the demands upon Great Britain for repairs and refits for American ships would increase; that on these grounds it would not be unreasonable to ask the United States Government to consider sympathetically the material replacement of British merchant tonnage lost or not able to be replaced by new construction for the reasons given, having regard to the fact that a very large part of the tonnage of American ships was actually on order and under construction on behalf of Great Britain when the United States entered the war and has since been taken over by the United States; also that it had been found convenient, in the national interest, to clothe and equip in divers ways a large proportion of the United States Army now operating in France, thereby utilising man-power which could otherwise have been devoted to shipbuilding, of which labour was the limiting factor.

Sir Leo Chiozza Money said that the Minister of Shipping was in full accord with the First Lord's statement of facts. He thought that, if anything, the First Lord underestimated the rapid increase of the American mercantile marine. It was not improbable that, by 1920 or 1921, if the present conditions continued the United States would actually have a bigger mercantile marine than we should have. With reference to the First Lord's point about an adjustment being made between America and this country as regards the material replacement of British merchant tonnage lost in American service, Sir Leo Money said that, in the event of our acquiring United States vessels, everything depended on the date of transfer. At the present time American prices of ships were about 50 per cent greater than ours. If the vessels could be obtained immediately, it would be an advantage to us; but if the transfer were delayed until some time after the war, we might stand to lose on the bargain.

The War Cabinet decided that—

A Conference should be held at the Foreign Office to discuss the points raised in the First Lord's memorandum, and to this end the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs was requested to invite the attendance of the First Lord of the Admiralty, the Minister of Shipping, and Lord Reading.

7. As germane to the preceding subject, Mr. Chamberlain said that the Economic Defence and Development Committee, of which he was Chairman, had received strong representations confirming the First Lord's statement in regard to the effort which we were making in clothing and equipping in divers ways a large proportion of the United States Army now operating in France. Mr. Chamberlain pointed out that the United States were making enormous demands
Transport Work of big Liners across the Atlantic.

The War Cabinet decided—

To invite the attention of the Secretary of State for War and the Ministry of Munitions to this question, with a view to their seeing what could be done to induce the United States authorities to supply themselves to a greater extent than they were now doing, and to carry their own supplies in their own ships.

Transport Work of big Liners across the Atlantic.

8. The War Cabinet had before them a joint Memorandum by the First Lord of the Admiralty and the Minister of Shipping, covering a Memorandum by the First Sea Lord in regard to the transport work of the big liners "Mauretania," "Aquitania," and "Olympic" across the Atlantic (Paper G.T.-5345).

The First Sea Lord said that he had raised this question because he wished the War Cabinet to realise the fact that these large ships were now incurring somewhat heavier risks, while carrying American troops, than they had hitherto done, owing to the fact that the enemy now had submarine cruisers operating in the Atlantic. The risk, therefore, of these ships being torpedoed was extended from the areas which were previously considered dangerous to the whole passage across. Personally he was of opinion that the risk of running the big liners should continue to be taken.

Sir Eric Geddes said that he had consulted with Sir Joseph Maclay on the subject, and, after the most careful consideration, they were of opinion that the responsibility for continuing to run these ships should be taken. The result of this policy might conceivably mean considerable loss of life if the worst happened. He therefore asked the War Cabinet to confirm the recommendation made to them.

The War Cabinet decided that—

The big liners in question should continue to be employed for the conveyance of American troops, as at present.

9. With reference to War Cabinet 366, Minute 13, the War Cabinet took note of a Memorandum by the Secretary of State for War, entitled "Prevention of Venereal Disease in the Army" (Paper G.T.-5299).

There was a short discussion of the paper, in the course of which the Secretary of State for War drew the attention of the War Cabinet to the importance attached by the French authorities to this question, and to the fears they entertained as to the consequences of the War Cabinet decision to place Maisons de Tolerance out of bounds.

The Under-Secretary of State for War briefly described the prophylactic efforts made by the British and Dominion Military authorities to combat the disease, and the measures now in operation. He further informed the Cabinet that a very influential Conference, including representatives of his Department, the
Admiralty, the Dominion and American Forces, and the Churches, had already met on two occasions at the War Office, and that the result of their deliberations had been noted.

10. The War Cabinet had before them the draft of a Bill to extend the power of taking possession of premises under the Defence of the Realm Acts (Paper G.T.-5293). Sir A. Durrant explained that the Bill had been prepared by the Parliamentary Draughtsmen at the request of the War Cabinet Committee on Accommodation. The Bill was an extension of the Defence of the Realm Acts, and applicable to acquisition only.

The War Cabinet decided that—

The Draft Bill should be submitted to the Secretary of State for Home Affairs, who should be asked to scrutinise it, in the first instance, in case he might think it desirable to bring it before the Committee of Home Affairs.

11. With reference to War Cabinet 437, Minute 19, the War Cabinet had before them a memorandum by Sir A. Steel-Maitland, with a covering-note by Lord Robert Cecil, on the question of accommodation for the Department of Overseas Trade (Paper G.T.-5338). The Paper stated that the Department of Overseas Trade, which was created in the autumn of 1917 as a Joint Department of the Board of Trade and the Foreign Office, was at present housed in buildings in Basinghall Street. The work of the Department was, however, so intimately bound up with that of the parent Departments, and in particular the Foreign Office, that inefficiency and the risk of serious mistakes, apart from much delay and inconvenience, were caused by the separation. The Office of Works had undertaken to erect immediately buildings on the Horse Guards Parade to accommodate the staff, provided the sanction of the War Cabinet was obtained. The War Cabinet had sanctioned the proposal (War Cabinet 437, Minute 19), subject to the approval of the War Priorities Committee, who, in turn, approved it subject to the consent of the Works Construction Sub-Committee. The latter, however, on the ground of shortage of labour and of building material, had declined to give their approval.

General Smuts, as Chairman of the War Priorities Committee, explained that, although the Works Construction Sub-Committee of his Committee had refused sanction, the matter had not yet been reconsidered by the War Priorities Committee. He proposed shortly to call a meeting of the latter Committee, in order to examine the question afresh, and he intended to ask the Assistant Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs to attend the meeting when the matter was discussed.

12. The War Cabinet had before them a Memorandum by the Food Controller (Paper G.T.-5343) regarding the Conference of Allied Food Controllers.

Mr. Clynes drew the attention of the War Cabinet to certain Resolutions passed by the Food Controllers, and especially Resolution No. 2, which called the attention of the Allied Governments to the necessity of—

(a.) Facilitating the construction of railway material in all Allied countries by allocating the greater number of men and a larger quantity of material for this purpose;
(b.) Allocating tonnage for the immediate transport of trucks and locomotives in all countries where they are urgently needed;

(c.) The adequate provision of finance for the purpose.

Mr. Clynes said that, as the attention of the Departments concerned had already been called to these resolutions, all he desired was that the War Cabinet should take note of his memorandum.

Mr. Clynes also raised the question of the representation of the Dominions on the Committee of Representatives of Food Controllers, and pointed out that, as the question was one of principle, involving political considerations, he would require to bring the matter before the War Cabinet at a later date.

Mr. Clynes was requested to keep in touch with the War Cabinet on the subject.  

(Initialled)  A. B. L.

2, Whitehall Gardens, S.W.,
August 9, 1918.