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SECRET.

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WAR CABINET, 466.

*Minutes of a Meeting of the War Cabinet held at 10, Downing Street, S.W.,
on Friday, August 30, 1918, at 12 noon.*

Present :

The PRIME MINISTER (*in the Chair*).

The Right Hon. the EARL CURZON of KEDLESTON, K.G., G.C.S.I., G.C.I.E.	Lieutenant-General the Right Hon. J. C. SMUTS, K.C.
The Right Hon. A. BONAR LAW, M.P.	The Right Hon. AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN, M.P.
The Right Hon. G. N. BARNES, M.P.	

The following were also present :—

The Right Hon. the VISCOUNT MILNER, G.C.B., G.C.M.G., Secretary of State for War.	The Right Hon. SIR ERIC GEDDES, G.B.E., K.C.B., M.P., First Lord of the Ad- miralty.
General SIR H. H. WILSON, K.C.B., D.S.O., Chief of the Imperial General Staff.	Admiral SIR R. E. WEMYSS, G.C.B., C.M.G., M.V.O., First Sea Lord and Chief of the Naval Staff.
The Right Hon. LORD ROBERT CECIL, K.C., M.P., Assistant Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.	The Right Hon. the EARL OF READING, G.C.B., K.C.V.O., K.C., His Majesty's High Commissioner and Special Am- bassador to the United States of America.

Lieutenant-Colonel SIR M. P. A. HANKEY, K.C.B., *Secretary*.

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

Lieutenant-Colonel L. STORR, *Assistant Secretary*.

The Western Front.

1. THE Chief of the Imperial General Staff said that he had nothing further to tell the War Cabinet beyond what had appeared in the latest telegrams. The number of German divisions on the Western front was decreasing; they now numbered 197 so far as our information went. There was a net decrease of ten divisions in the whole German army. It seemed unlikely that the Germans could dispose of fresh reinforcements until the 1920 class were placed in the ranks. The men in this class, at the end of the present year, would average 18½ years of age. The Germans had put their 1918 class into the line at that age, and, as the result of their experience, kept back the 1919 class. Should, however, the enemy decide in the near future to bring in the 1920 class this autumn, it would mean that they were in very serious straits as regards man-power.

General Wilson stated that our troops had now crossed the Somme in places, and the Nord Canal. There was no water in the Canal, and it could not form more than a temporary line of resistance. Opposite General Mangin, the enemy resistance was stiffening, but

it was more than probable that the enemy would decide to make a real stand on the Hindenburg line. So far, four Austrian divisions had been identified on the Western front, two in the line, and two at Arlon. These had no corps headquarters, and were apparently sent up as independent units for the purpose of reinforcement. The number of reserve divisions fit to go into the line was 14, of which 2 were in Prince Rupprecht's army, 2 belonged to Von Boehn, 5 to the Crown Prince, 4 to Prince Albrecht, and 1 was not located.

Allusion was made to an announcement which had appeared in some of the French newspapers to the effect that the American army was about to carry out a big stroke in France. It was suggested that if Marshal Foch had any such intention, its premature disclosure was most unfortunate.

Trans-Caucasia.

2. The Chief of the Imperial General Staff said that the latest news from Baku was rather disquieting. On the 26th instant about 600 Turks, with 7 guns, had attacked a section of the line, held by the North Staffordshires, with determination and charged with bayonets, forcing our men back after a gallant resistance. Our casualties amounted to 10 officers and 100 men, approximately. A telegram had also been received the previous day from the Commander-in-Chief in India, stating that, so far as his information went, there was a steady increase in Turkish strength in front of Baku, and it was possible that the Turks intended to advance from Tabriz eastward, either now or on completion of the collection of supplies apparently at present in progress. The telegram said that a recent message from General Dunsterville disclosed the futility and risk of endeavouring to manage by agreement the discordant and suspicious elements in the Central Caspian Government, and pointed out that the force at General Dunsterville's disposal was dangerously small. The Commander-in-Chief suggested that the time had now arrived for General Dunsterville to receive definite orders to use force, if necessary, in order to seize the Caspian Fleet and all other shipping that he could collect, and to do the utmost possible damage to the port and to the oilfields. General Wilson pointed out that, although General Marshall had plenty of troops in Mesopotamia which he could send to General Dunsterville's support, the transport difficulties were at present insuperable. We had placed an order (War Cabinet 455, Minute 6) with the American Government for 1,300 Ford cars to be sent to Mesopotamia, but this order had not been accepted. He thought it possible that he might be able to provide 200 other cars from England.

Mr. Chamberlain suggested that, as a temporary expedient, a certain number of tractors, which had been ordered by the Food Production Department, might be diverted for this purpose if that Department had not been able to take delivery yet.

The War Cabinet requested—

The Secretary of State for War to take up the question in consultation with the ~~Ministry of Food~~ *Food Production Department*.

Situation in North Russia.

3. The War Cabinet had before them a memorandum from the Director of Military Operations to the Secretary of the War Cabinet (Paper G.T.-5527), covering telegram No. 855, dated the 26th August, 1918, from the Rear-Admiral, White Sea, Murmansk, to the Admiralty. The telegram stated that, in the Rear-Admiral's opinion, the military situation both at Murmansk and Archangel would be very serious unless considerable reinforcements, in excess of those already detailed, were sent before the end of October. With regard to the Murmansk forces, the present intention was to withdraw all troops from the south of Kandalaksha, and also from Petchenga. The Rear-Admiral

considered such withdrawals would be politically disastrous, and, in order to obviate this necessity, he asked for a further reinforcement of 5,000 troops.

The Chief of the Imperial General Staff said that the news from Murmansk was not good. General Maynard, who had a considerable reputation as a fine fighting officer, and in whom the War Office had great confidence, was inclined to give up Petchenga, which might have certain political results.

The First Lord of the Admiralty said that the Admiralty proposed to replace H.M.S. "Cochrane," at Murmansk, by the Russian ship "Askold." He thought that General Maynard was under some misapprehension as to the purposes for which the "Cochrane" and other ships had been sent to that theatre. These purposes had been clearly explained to General Poole, but they were not realised by General Maynard. It was important that, before the ice set in, various ships should be withdrawn, either for refitting or because, for structural reasons, they could not withstand ice pressure. Every ship we kept in those waters involved a great loss of economy in coal, transport, &c. It was a great waste of man-power to keep the men of the "Cochrane" so long on shore. He wished, further, to point out that the situation had considerably developed in the last two months. Our North Sea barrage had proved much more efficient than we had anticipated, and its moral and actual effect was increasing. This would all be lost to us if we had to abandon the Arctic ports.

The First Sea Lord explained that, if the Germans were to prolong their railway, they would be able to start new sea bases for submarines, as well as for surface raiders.

After some discussion as to whether, should such a course prove inevitable, it would be preferable to relinquish Archangel or Murmansk and Petchenga, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff pointed out that our effort in that theatre was based on the assumption that we should obtain the support of about 20,000 Czecho-Slovaks. This project, unfortunately, had not materialised.

The First Lord explained that if we lost both Petchenga and Murmansk, the fall of Archangel was bound to follow, as the enemy could then open a submarine base and operate against our flank.

The Secretary reminded the War Cabinet that the question of our operations in the White Sea was now engaging the attention of the Military Representatives of the Supreme War Council.

The War Cabinet agreed that it was very important that reinforcements should be sent to the White Sea ports, if this could be done without prejudice to the present offensive on the Western front, and directed—

The Chief of the Imperial General Staff to examine the question, and to report to them at an early date:—

- (a.) The number of reinforcements necessary to maintain our hold on the ports.
- (b.) Whether these reinforcements could be made available.

Norwegian Territorial Waters.

4. With reference to War Cabinet 462, Minute 6, the First Sea Lord again pressed the importance of arriving at an early decision in regard to the mining of Norwegian territorial waters, as the situation had now reached an acutely critical stage.

The War Cabinet agreed that the decision to be taken was one of great importance, in view of the present reluctance of the United States to participate in our proposed action, and decided that—

The matter should be brought before them at the earliest opportunity when the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs could be present.

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

5. In continuation of War Cabinet 456, Minute 6, the First Lord of the Admiralty stated that his views in the matter of the naval effort of Great Britain and the United States of America had been amplified in his Papers G.T.-5494 and 5508. In a note by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs (Paper G.T.-5521) it was recommended that the question of the adjustment of the shipbuilding programme (so that the ratio of merchant-ship construction to warship construction should be the same in both countries) should be examined by the First Lord and Mr. Roosevelt, but he (Sir Eric Geddes) had ascertained that Mr. Roosevelt had no powers as regards the allocation of naval ships. He therefore suggested that it would be of advantage if he discussed the matter with the naval authorities in America, and mentioned that the Board of Admiralty had drawn up a scheme of naval allocation of the two forces, which, if agreed to by the United States authorities, would enable the Admiralty to adopt a programme of naval construction resulting in the release from naval yards, for transfer to merchant shipbuilding, of some 20,000 largely skilled and partially skilled men. Sir Eric Geddes considered that the question of adjustment of merchant ships between the Americans and ourselves should, as far as possible, be dealt with separately.

Lord Reading was of the opinion that although the naval yards in the United States were separately organised to the mercantile yards, yet, owing to the dependence of both on the output of steel, engines, &c., it would be impossible to confine any such discussion to naval shipbuilding. He added that steps were being taken with a view to persuading Mr. Hurley to visit this country to discuss the merchant shipbuilding situation.

Reference was made to the fact that France was now inclined to support our case *re* shipping against America, which indicated that negotiations on this side of the water would be conducted in a better atmosphere, as far as we were concerned.

It was also mentioned that the situation in America as regards shipbuilding was different from what prevailed in this country, in so far as in America the mercantile marine had the first call on the shipbuilding resources of the States, whereas in England the naval needs of the country were given the chief consideration, and, consequently, the first step was to convert Mr. Hurley to our point of view.

Sir Eric Geddes said that his information did not confirm this view, he, however, stated that the output of the United States naval yards, as forecasted, was considered by the United States authorities as ample, under existing conditions, and that it was the allocation of the ships that were turned out that was the point he wished to settle.

The War Cabinet decided—

To defer further discussion on the First Lord's proposal until it had been ascertained whether Mr. Hurley would accept the invitation to come to England.

Supreme War
Council.

6. The War Cabinet agreed that, in view of the Prime Minister's political engagements, the next meeting of the Supreme War Council (except in case of great emergency), should not be held before the third or fourth week in September.

2, Whitehall Gardens, S.W.,
August 30, 1918.