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SECRET.

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WAR CABINET, 479.

Minutes of a Meeting of the War Cabinet held at 10, Downing Street, S.W., on Friday, September 27, 1918, at 12 noon.

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. AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN,
M.P.

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.

The Right Hon. SIR E. 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 (for
Minutes 1 to 10).

Admiral SIR R. E. WEYMSS, G.C.B.,
C.M.G., M.V.O., First Sea Lord and
Chief of the Naval Staff.

Major-General F. H. SYKES, C.M.G., Chief
of the Royal Air Staff (for Minutes 1
to 10).

Rear-Admiral G. P. W. HOPE, C.B., Deputy
First Sea Lord.

SIR ROBERT S. HORNE, K.B.E., K.C.,
Third Civil Lord of the Admiralty (for
Minutes 12 to 14).

Rear-Admiral C. M. DE BARTOLOMÉ, C.B.,
Admiralty Controller (for Minutes 12
to 14).

Mr. C. H. MERZ (for Minute 12).

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

Captain L. F. BURGIS, *Assistant Secretary.*

Captain CLEMENT JONES, *Assistant Secretary.*

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

The Western
Front.

1. In continuation of War Cabinet 478, Minute 3, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff reported satisfactory news in regard to the Franco-American advance. The Americans had pushed forward 16 kilometres down the Meuse. They and the French together had taken 14,000 prisoners up to the previous night, and were reported to be advancing without much opposition. If this attack were completely successful, and it were possible fully to exploit the victory as far as Mézières, there was every likelihood of a big retreat on the part of the enemy, which would clear a large tract of territory. In that case the Germans might make a stand at Lille, but they could not do so at St. Quentin.

British Attack.

2. The Chief of the Imperial General Staff reported that an attack had been made that morning by the Ist and IIIrd British Armies opposite Cambrai. The latest information was to the effect that the attack was proceeding satisfactorily.

German Moral.

3. With reference to War Cabinet 478, Minute 4, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff said that the recent incident, when three officers and 104 Germans of the 273rd North Prussian Regiment had walked over to our lines to the north-west of St. Quentin and had surrendered voluntarily, was very significant. This was the first time in the War that such a case had occurred. These men had reported that the German *moral* was very bad, and that they despaired of victory. News had also been received that German troops returning to Germany were spreading an atmosphere of despondency and alarm. An order issued by General Ludendorff had been captured which contained an allusion to this subject: all men who were suspected of being despondent were to be refused leave, and if a man on leave in Germany was heard expressing gloomy sentiments he was to be promptly sent back to the front.

Austrian Divisions.

4. With reference to War Cabinet 462, Minute 2, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff reported that another Austrian division had been identified in the Vosges, making a total of five Austrian divisions on the Western front.

The Caucasus.

5. The Chief of the Imperial General Staff reported that the Germans were withdrawing the whole of their men from the Caucasus. The Turks also were trying to withdraw their forces, with the result that there was great confusion between the Turks and the Germans at Batoum and in the interior.

Italy.

6. The Chief of the Imperial General Staff reported that since General Diaz had shown clearly that he was not going to attack, the British had withdrawn nine battalions, and we were replacing our present fresh divisions with tired ones from the Western front. General Badoglio had expressed his willingness, in the event of there being no attack, to send Italian divisions to France.

Archangel.

7. The Chief of the Imperial General Staff said that arrangements were being made between the War Office and the Admiralty for the fitting out and freezing-in of a hospital ship at Archangel, where hospital arrangements were reported to be inadequate.

Submarines.

8. The First Sea Lord reported two attacks on enemy submarines: one in the Mediterranean, carried out by the French, the other outside the Firth of Forth.

Palestine:
Work of the
Royal Air Force.

9. The Chief of the Air Staff said that he had received a telegram from Egypt in regard to the work of the Royal Air Force during the recent operations in Palestine.

The War Cabinet requested—

The Chief of the Air Staff to circulate copies of this telegram.

Bombing of
Constantinople.

10. The Chief of the Air Staff stated that the aerial operations carried out in the Palestine had been performed at the expense of training in Egypt. He asked whether it was desired now to increase the bombing of Constantinople also at the expense of Egypt.

The War Cabinet decided that—

This question should be settled by the Chief of the Air Staff in consultation with the Chief of the Imperial General Staff and the Admiralty.

Railway Strike :
Telegram of
Appreciation to
Mr. J. H. Thomas.

11. With reference to War Cabinet 478, Minute 1, the War Cabinet discussed the desirability of sending a telegram of appreciation to Mr. J. H. Thomas, in recognition of his action during the recent strike. The following draft was proposed for the Secretary to send on their behalf :—

“The War Cabinet desire me to express to you their warm appreciation of the strong stand made by you against the strike, which endangered the national security as affected by the successful prosecution of the war no less than it threatened the basis of trade union action. The War Cabinet are very sorry to hear that the strain has affected your health, and hope that a short rest will quickly re-establish it and enable you to resume work which has been of such value to the nation.”

The matter was deferred pending an opportunity for the Chancellor of the Exchequer to consult the Prime Minister, and for Mr. Barnes to confer with Sir Albert Stanley on the subject.

National Research
Institution for the
Navy.

12. The War Cabinet had under consideration an Admiralty memorandum (Paper G.T.-5702) recommending a Physical Research Institution for the Navy.

Mr. Merz, on behalf of the Admiralty, explained that the proposal asked the War Cabinet for their approval of a policy for the creation of a proper Research Institution for the Navy. Nothing of this nature had existed in the past, and the war had shown the necessity for some such Institution, by which the scientists would be put in close touch with the naval officer as the practical man and *vice versa*. As an instance of the need for such an Institution, Mr. Merz quoted the submarine menace and the necessity of solving the problem of accurately determining the whereabouts of a submarine when submerged. In the opinion of experts it was essential to deal, in the first instance, with pure research, prior to practical application, for inventions would not follow without the former method being adopted. He stated that the proposal had been very exhaustively considered by Sir J. J. Thompson, Sir E. Rutherford, and Sir Richard Threlfall, and they were unanimously of opinion that the best method of making the services of science available to the needs of the Navy would be to establish a Naval Research Laboratory for Physics, for the purpose of making scientific research of a fundamental and pioneer character on all problems underlying the work of the Navy. As regards the question as to how far such a policy was justified in view of its having no great effect during the war, Mr. Merz stated that this argument could well be met by the fact that the country's research facilities in all directions were deplorably deficient, and that an Institution, if created for the Navy, could be utilised for research work in other than naval directions. Mr. Merz stated that the lowness of our expenditure, as compared with other countries, was astounding : in fact, the Americans would vote in one year the sum total asked for by the Admiralty, namely 400,000*l.*, for this purpose.

The First Lord of the Admiralty stated that, although there were other institutions in existence dealing with research work, they were not suitable for that required by the Navy. It was essential, for naval work, that absolute secrecy must be observed, and this was

not practicable when work of a commercial nature was being carried out. He was sure that if, at the outbreak of war, we had had the organisation which he now recommended in this respect, we should now have been much nearer a solution of the submarine menace, and that what was required was an institution in which the scientists and the naval experts were working together. The three points he wished to make were :—

- (a.) Secrecy must be possible.
- (b.) That it should be devoted to non-commercial research.
- (c.) That it should work closely with the Navy, department by department.

Lord Curzon stated that, as Lord President of the Council, he was President of the Committee of Scientific and Industrial Research, and, although he considered that the First Lord had made out a very good case, and admitted that research work in England was in a very confused condition, to remedy which efforts were now being made, he thought care must be taken that money was not wasted, and that overlapping between kindred bodies should not arise. He therefore suggested that it would be well, before agreeing to the Admiralty proposal, that the matter should be considered by the Council of the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research. He mentioned the existence of a further institution, namely, the National Physical Laboratory, which was doing a good deal of work on somewhat parallel lines to that of the proposed new institution, and he thought that they should also have an opportunity of considering the Admiralty proposal.

It was pointed out that, if the War Cabinet sanctioned the Admiralty proposal, we should be met by demands from the Ministry of Munitions and from the Royal Air Force for the creation of similar institutions connected with the Army and the Air forces, and that it was highly important that the several Departments should not conduct their research work in watertight compartments, but that, as far as might be practicable, consistent with secrecy, the research should cover the widest field; otherwise the knowledge acquired in one would not be available for the others.

Mr. Balfour stated that, whilst he was First Lord of the Admiralty, he started the Board of Invention and Research, which he believed had done good work. He agreed with the First Lord that science and practical knowledge must be combined, and emphasised the point made by him that secrecy was essential, which would not be possible if they were amalgamated. Mr. Balfour appreciated the danger of isolation, and thought it might be possible to have a few men of position who could be made Directors of all Research Institutions that might be set up, so that data obtained by one branch, if not of a secret nature, might be available for the others.

The War Cabinet agreed in principle that something was necessary on behalf of Naval research, and decided—

To appoint a Committee, of which Lord Curzon consented to be Chairman, to enquire into the recommendations of the Admiralty, in the light of the discussion set out above, Lord Curzon to be assisted in this matter by—

The Minister of Education, and Representatives of—
 The Admiralty.
 The Ministry of Munitions.
 The War Office.
 The Treasury.
 The Air Ministry.
 The National Physical Laboratory.
 The Department of Scientific and Industrial Research.

The War Cabinet also requested—

The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs to assist the deliberations of the above Committee if he could spare the time.

Strike of Clyde
Shipwrights.

13. With reference to War Cabinet 478, Minute 2, the Chancellor of the Exchequer informed the War Cabinet that a notice, relative to the Clyde strike, had been prepared and would appear in the newspapers, &c., on the following day, to operate from Tuesday next. The notice would specify that the certificates of protection would be withdrawn if the men did not return by that day.

Sir Robert Horne informed the War Cabinet that he had received information to the effect that it was thought that the men would be prepared to return to work on Tuesday, Monday being a general holiday on the Clyde.

Discontent in the
Navy.

14. The First Lord informed the War Cabinet that Mr. Lionel Yexley, the editor of "The Fleet," recently circulated a document on the question of unrest on the lower deck of the Navy, in which he made alarming statements relative to the grievances that existed on the part of the men. Sir Eric Geddes stated that the Board of Admiralty had gone into the matter most exhaustively, and the result of their enquiries led them to the opinion that there was a certain amount of dissatisfaction, but that there was no reason to believe that such dissatisfaction was of an alarming nature. Most of the grievances which could be substantiated related to pay, and concessions had been made in certain cases that had already been enquired into, and further enquiries were being made into the remaining cases. The origin of the discontent appeared to be the difference between the pay awarded to civilians as compared with that of the fighting forces, and the influence that the same had on the comforts of the seamen's homes. Sir Eric Geddes then read to the War Cabinet a letter which he had written to the Prime Minister on this subject.

In this connection, reference was made to the War Cabinet 477, Minute 4, in which the Soldiers' and Sailors' Pay Committee were asked to see whether separation allowances to the relatives and dependants of sailors and soldiers ought not now to be increased.

The War Cabinet decided that—

The question of increasing the pay of the Army and Navy should not be considered until after the question of an increase in the separation allowances had been reported upon.

Naval Situation in
the Black Sea :
Command in the
Mediterranean.

15. The War Cabinet had under consideration the naval situation in the Black Sea and the command in the Mediterranean, as set out in Admiralty memorandum G.T.-5775, in which it was pointed out that by the end of November next it would be possible for the enemy to come out of the Dardanelles in excessive force at his selected moment, do great damage, and then return to his bases.

The First Lord drew the attention of the War Cabinet to the probable strength of the Russo-Turko-German Black Sea forces as compared with the Allied Ægean squadron, the latter being at normal strength, which indicated a superiority on the part of the enemy. To meet this, in part, Sir Eric Geddes stated that the Admiralty were relieving two of our pre-Dreadnoughts in the Ægean by two Dreadnoughts; but, in spite of the improvement which would result from this action, the Allies would still have an inferiority of light

not practicable when work of a commercial nature was being carried out. He was sure that if, at the outbreak of war, we had had the organisation which he now recommended in this respect, we should now have been much nearer a solution of the submarine menace, and that what was required was an institution in which the scientists and the naval experts were working together. The three points he wished to make were :—

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craft in the *Ægean* Sea and elsewhere. The First Lord stated that this state of affairs need not exist if the Allied naval forces already in the Mediterranean were used to the best advantage, and that the only way of effecting this improvement was to obtain permission of our Allies to the appointment of a British Admiral as Admiralissimo in the Mediterranean (War Cabinet 431, Minute 4). The First Lord stated that, since the matter was last discussed by the War Cabinet, he had been continuing his conversations with the Italian Government, by permission of the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, through the British Ambassador at Rome, but informally, and, as far as could be gathered, the Italians now agreed to the appointment of Lord Jellicoe as Admiralissimo, subject to that officer being under the Supreme War Council at Versailles. The Board of Admiralty considered that direct control by the Supreme War Council was impracticable. The condition of naval warfare depended to a very marked extent on considerations of technical detail, on which the Supreme War Council would have no knowledge whatsoever, and it was essential that the Admiralissimo should be under the immediate orders of some body which had the requisite technical knowledge and staff. The Board therefore advocated that he should be under the Allied Naval Council, which was an executive body, and which would consider Lord Jellicoe's demands for the Mediterranean, which was a minor theatre of war, in conjunction with the needs of the main theatre of war, namely, the North Sea. Sir Eric Geddes asked that the War Cabinet would approve further negotiations being conducted with the Italians by the Foreign Office, on the lines recommended by the Admiralty, to which the other Naval Powers agreed.

It was pointed out that the Italian objection would be met by the procedure advocated, as, if a unanimous decision were not reached by the Allied Naval Council, the matter could be brought before the Supreme War Council for settlement, and consequently Lord Jellicoe, though under the Allied Naval Council, would be, through that body, subject to the Supreme War Council.

The War Cabinet approved the proposal of the First Lord of the Admiralty, and requested him to arrange with the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs as to the form of communication to be made to the Italian Government.

(Initialled) A. B. L.

2, *Whitehall Gardens*, S.W.,
September 27, 1918.