Minutes of a Meeting of the War Cabinet and Imperial War Cabinet held at 10, Downing Street, S.W., on Tuesday, October 1, 1918, at 11.30 A.M.

Present:

The Right Hon. A. Bonar Law, M.P. (in the Chair).

The Right Hon. W. M. Hughes, Prime Minister of Australia.

The Right Hon. W. F. Lloyd, K.C., Prime Minister of Newfoundland.

Lieutenant-General the Right Hon. J. C. Smuts, K.C., Minister for Defence, Union of South Africa.

The following were also present:


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 5).

The Right Hon. Sir J. Maclay, Bart., Shipping Controller (for Minute 6).

Sir Leo G. Chiozza Money, M.P., Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Shipping (for Minute 6).

Mr. A. Weir, Surveyor-General of Supply (for Minute 6).

The Right Hon. W. S. Churchill, M.P., Minister of Munitions (for Minute 6).

The Right Hon. R. E. Prothero, M.V.O., M.P., President, Board of Agriculture and Fisheries (for Minute 8).

Sir J. M. Dodds, K.C.B., Under-Secretary for Scotland (for Minute 8).

The Right Hon. J. R. Clynes, M.P., Food Controller (for Minute 6).

Major the Hon. W. Astor, M.P., Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Food (for Minute 6).

Mr. J. A. Salter, Ministry of Shipping (for Minute 6).

Sir J. F. Beale, K.B.E., Secretary, Ministry of Food (for Minute 6).

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 Right Hon. the Viscount Milner, G.C.B., G.C.M.G., Secretary of State for War.


The Right Hon. E. S. Montagu, M.P., Secretary of State for India.


Captain L. F. Burd, Assistant Secretary.

Lieutenant-Colonel Leslie Wilson, C.M.G., D.S.O., M.P., Assistant Secretary.

Captain Clement Jones, Assistant Secretary.

[1865—480]
I. THE War Cabinet had under consideration a telegram No. 1177, from Lord Derby dealing with the surrender of Bulgaria and the conditions of the armistice granted.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer said that there was really no news about Bulgaria, except what was contained in this telegram. At the meeting which he addressed yesterday, he had endeavoured to show that the terms of the armistice had been arranged by the Allies in consultation; but events had moved so quickly that, as a matter of fact, it appeared that the conditions had been laid down by the French Commander-in-Chief in Salonica, General Franchet d'Esperey. It would seem also from the last paragraph of the telegram even as if General d'Esperey had arranged the conditions of the armistice before communicating even with M. Clemenceau.

In reply to a question as to whether M. Clemenceau had authority from Great Britain and the other Allies to act in this matter, the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs expressed the opinion that the conditions of the armistice were practically a military convention, and carried with them no powers of peace. On questions of peace terms all the Allies were on an equality, but in regard to a military convention the General Officer Commanding in the Field must necessarily be in a position to act promptly. The line which could be drawn between a military and a political situation could be defined as that which laid down the conditions for an armistice and that which defined the terms of peace, and in this instance nothing had been decided about the future of Bulgaria. It was certainly true that peace terms might be affected by the terms of an armistice, and Mr. Balfour pointed out that the Prime Minister and he had despatched a telegram to Paris on Saturday last dealing with the Bulgarian request for an armistice, the terms of which were in fact almost identical with those actually adopted.

The attention of the War Cabinet was particularly drawn to that part of the telegram dealing with the note sent by the United States Minister at Sofia to General d'Esperey demanding the mediation of President Wilson and the reply of M. Clemenceau telling General d'Esperey to have no relations with the Minister, and informing him that he had telegraphed to Washington protesting against such intervention.

The Secretary said that he had spoken on the telephone to the Prime Minister, who was in general agreement with M. Clemenceau's telegram, but was sending up that morning, by Lord Milner, a telegram to be sent in reply.

Lord Reading urged that it would be most undesirable for the Government to associate themselves with what might be considered by President Wilson to be a rebuff. Whatever our right might be, such a proceeding must inevitably create a most deplorable position.

It was pointed out that the War Cabinet had no evidence before them either that President Wilson would adopt the attitude taken up by the United States Minister at Sofia, or that the Minister was acting on instructions from Washington, and it was suggested that a telegram should be sent to Lord Derby stating that the War Cabinet were apprehensive as to the terms of the telegram sent to Washington by M. Clemenceau, and requesting him to forward a copy of the telegram in full.

The Chief of the Imperial General Staff said that the military situation which was now being created in Bulgaria was one which demanded most careful consideration. When General Guillaumat advocated the present campaign in Macedonia, the main reasons put forward were that, if it were successful, the French and British troops could then be withdrawn. Now M. Clemenceau, in instructing General d'Esperey to go to the Danube as quickly as possible in order to cut off supplies, and also to the Black Sea at Constanza, was preparing a campaign without any consultation with the Allies.
M. Clemenceau also proposed to occupy strategic positions, which presumably meant Sofia, but there was to be no interference with Bulgarian affairs. It was difficult to understand how there could be no interference with the civil authorities in Bulgaria if the Bulgarian army were demobilised and disarmed, and local disturbances, even if there were no attack by the enemy, took place. M. Clemenceau had apparently taken charge of the situation from a military point of view, and he could not possibly know what railways, transports, or reinforcements were available. As far as could be ascertained, General Milne was pushing up troops in lorries to Sofia so as to take part in a parade there, if one took place. Moreover, M. Clemenceau was confining the Serbians to Serbia and the Greeks to Greece, so that consequently the only troops who entered Bulgaria would be French, British, and Italians. There was one further point of great importance, namely, that at the meeting of the Supreme War Council at Versailles, M. Clemenceau had agreed that no General should be appointed to command in Salonica without the approval of the Allies, if any alteration in the present command was made. General Guillaumat had apparently been sent out by M. Clemenceau with instructions to General d'Esperey, and General Guillaumat appeared to act now in the capacity of Commissioner.

It was generally agreed that the Allied Governments must be consulted before any further military operations took place, and that this consultation could only take place at a meeting of the Supreme War Council.

The War Cabinet decided that—

In the opinion of the War Cabinet, it was essential that a meeting of the Supreme War Council should be held as soon as possible in Paris, in order to discuss the political and military situations which had now arisen.

2. Arising out of the previous Minute, the War Cabinet had under consideration the situation which would arise if the Turkish Commander-in-Chief forwarded to General Allenby proposals for an armistice similar to those which had been proposed by Bulgaria, and it was pointed out that it was most important that the Government should be ready at any moment to meet this situation. The opinion was expressed that if Turkey asked for an armistice, instructions should be at once sent for the British fleet to go to the Black Sea, and that as it might be only a question of hours, it would be most advisable for the Admiralty to have all the plans prepared.

The First Sea Lord explained the difficulty of the situation as regards the naval affairs in the Mediterranean, and pointed out that the British Admiral, although he commanded the Aegean zone and all the small craft, was under the command of the French Admiral. The British Admiralty would certainly not like to see a squadron going up the Dardanelles except under British command. If Turkey went out of the war it was possible that the “Goeben” might come out of the Straits, but it was more likely that she would go back to Odessa. With regard to the Russian ships, Admiral Wemyss said it was not thought that they could not be ready until November, and the Allied naval force would be able to account for them in the Black Sea. The Admiralty were sending out two Dreadnoughts to relieve the “Lord Nelson” and the “Agamemnon.” The first of these was due to leave England on the 9th of this month, but arrangements could be made by which she could leave at an earlier date. The other Dreadnought was doing a long refit, and would not be ready until the end of next month. It was impossible to send any more Dreadnoughts from the Grand Fleet. A force was being prepared to send out to Serbia to act on the Danube if it was required.

In reply to the opinion expressed that the “Goeben” might
prevent Turkey from accepting peace, by the bombardment of Constantinople, Admiral Wemyss said that from the point of view of gun power, the Allied ships available in the Mediterranean could deal with the “Goeben” so long as she did not get away, but that she had a greater speed than any Allied ships in the Mediterranean.

The War Cabinet decided that—

(a.) The First Lord of the Admiralty and the Secretary of State for War should prepare a memorandum making suggestions as to the naval and military conditions which should be laid down in the event of Turkey asking for an armistice.

(b.) That the question of the naval, military, and political situations in the event of Turkey’s withdrawal from the war could only be adequately dealt with by a meeting of the Supreme War Council.

The War Cabinet took note of the undertaking of the First Sea Lord of the Admiralty to despatch the first Dreadnought to the Aegean as soon as possible.

3. The Chief of the Imperial General Staff reported that he had seen Marshal Foch on the previous day, who was very pleased with the situation on the Western front. There was no doubt that if October remained fine the enemy would have to retire a long way. The military authorities knew of no line to which they could retire so strong as that of the Meuse.

In the north the Belgians were making remarkable progress between Ypres and Dixmude. They were now, according to latest information, about a mile from Roulers, and if their movements extended towards Bruges the coast should be disengaged, and it was probable that we should get Ostend and Zeebrugge back, and the German flank resting on Holland. The Belgians were being assisted by British forces under General Plumer, and by the French, who had sent six infantry divisions and three cavalry divisions to help them.

Further south, between the Scarpe and Cambrai, the Canadians were having heavy engagements against the Germans, who were fighting well in this district. North of St. Quentin an attack was made the previous morning by two American divisions, supported by two Australian—the American divisions went gallantly forward, but progressed so rapidly without sufficiently mopping up, that there were, according to latest reports, large numbers of German troops between the Americans and the Australians. In this district the 46th Division had done exceptionally well, taking 4,000 prisoners yesterday. Further attacks were being made to the south, but the weather was so bad yesterday that General Wilson doubted if much had been done. South of Rheims, where the Americans were attacking, the roads were now in such a bad state that it would not be possible for any further movement to be made for some days. General Wilson said that some of the German divisions, particularly the Jagers, were fighting splendidly; other divisions not fighting at all. On the whole, the situation was very hopeful, and, given a fine month, it was impossible to say what progress might be made. It appeared as if the German High Command should have taken a decision to shorten their line some time ago. This, however, had not been done, and the German Army had now to stand the shock of attack on too long a line. The number of German divisions was now reduced to 187, and, as it was impossible for them to disengage on their present line, they would have to hold it as best they could until the weather made the ground too bad for further operations.
4. The First Sea Lord of the Admiralty reported that British ships were operating on the Belgian coast, and, by bombardment and other means, were endeavouring to give the idea that a landing would be made. Admiral Wemyss said that there were signs of evacuation of enemy light craft from the coast, and it was thought from the reconnaissance made that morning that some of the enemy destroyers had, in spite of the watchfulness of the British ships, managed by slipping up the coast to move into the Bight.

Submarines.

5. The First Sea Lord reported that U.S.S. “Tampa,” for some reason unknown, left the convoy to which she was attached on the 27th September and had been torpedoed.

The British Commander-in-Chief in the Mediterranean had reported that a British troopship was struck by a torpedo which did not explode, on the 26th September, off Cape Spartivento. Japanese torpedo boats then dropped depth charges, after which oil and wreckage was seen on the surface, and amongst the wreckage the air chamber of a broken torpedo.

The First Sea Lord said that the weather during the last few days had been extremely bad, causing very heavy seas, and that motor launch No. 247, owing to the heavy seas had been driven ashore, only one of the crew surviving out of nine.

Food Imports.

6. The War Cabinet had before them the following papers in regard to food importations and feeding stuffs:—

Memorandum by the Food Controller (Paper G.T.-5788).
Memorandum from the Ministry of Shipping (Paper G.T.-5799).
Memorandum by the President of the Board of Agriculture and Fisheries (Paper G.T.-5789).

Mr. Clynes said that two suggestions had been made whereby tonnage might be saved, namely: (a) the rationing of bread, (b) the restriction of animal feeding-stuffs.

As to the rationing of bread, he considered that this would be a very dangerous measure, having regard to the degree of unrest at present existing, and the fact that it would be impossible to ration bread equitably as between class and class. For instance, there were hundreds of thousands of munition and agricultural workers who carried bread with them for their midday meal because they could not get cooked vegetables, &c. In these circumstances bread could not be apportioned evenly, like meat.

The other course proposed, namely, the restriction of feeding-stuffs, and consequently the increased slaughter of herds, would produce great resentment amongst the farming class.

In this connection, Mr. Prothero endorsed the views of the Food Controller. He said that the farmers in this country were in daily dread of the American packing trade. If once our home-grown meat supply were cut down, it would take years to recover. The farmers' fear might be an empty one, but none the less it existed in the mind of every farmer. If feeding-stuffs were cut down, the result would be that an enormous number of insufficiently fed cattle must be killed.

With regard to the statement that our Allies had slaughtered their herds—France to the extent of one-third of her herds, Italy to the extent of one-fourth—Mr. Prothero said our position was totally different from that of our Allies. We were bound to use our grass country, because it was the only useful purpose to which it could be put; we were a great meat-eating nation, and a milk-drinking nation, to an extent to which our Allies were not.

In this connection it was stated that, notwithstanding recent depletion, the French herds, as compared with the population, were greater than the British.
Mr. Long, agreeing with Mr. Prothero, warned the Cabinet as to the gravity of the milk situation. There was a real shortage of milk, and if herds were to be still further reduced in quality and quantity, owing to increased restriction of feeding-stuffs, there would be a great danger of infantile disease in the large urban areas.

Mr. Churchill said that the Inter-Allied Munitions Council, upon which he represented the British Government, had been examining the problem of food and munitions imports recently in Paris. They had come to the conclusion that the best plan was to divide the year into two: that, during the first half-year, while home-grown cereal stocks were high, munitions should have tonnage priority over food; and that, during the second half of the year, after cereal stocks had been run down, food imports should have priority over munitions.

He urged that there should be no delay in the ratification of this conclusion by the Cabinet, because it was essential that the munition stocks of the Allies, which had been reduced during the summer and autumn campaigns, should be increased during the winter in preparation for the next campaign in the following spring. So far from the new form of open warfare resulting in a smaller expenditure of ammunition, it had had the contrary effect. Recent firings had beaten all previous records; during fifteen days 10,000 tons had been used. As a proof that ammunition had not been wasted, an order of Ludendorf’s had been found, from which it appeared that 13 per cent. of the German artillery had been destroyed in a single month, apart from the guns captured.

Mr. Churchill then submitted figures in regard to Inter-Allied munitions tonnage (Appendix). He understood that, in view of the reduction in nitrate products from Chile, the tonnage available for food and munitions would be about 40,000,000 tons; of which 22,000,000 tons would be for food, and 18,000,000 for munitions.

He suggested that, dividing the year into two, the allocation should be: 10,000,000 tons for food and 10,000,000 tons for munitions in the first six months; and 12,000,000 tons for food and 8,000,000 tons for munitions in the second six months.

Sir John Beale was of opinion that the Ministry of Food could meet Mr. Churchill’s views as to this programme for the first four or five months, in view of the food stocks in the country, and possibly for the first six months, though the figures for the whole half year had not been worked out in detail. He would prefer that the situation should be reviewed again at the end of six months, when a bigger programme of food imports might be shown to be necessary.

He pointed out that it was most desirable that, in dealing with this question of imports, all the British representatives on the various Inter-Allied bodies should speak with one voice. Otherwise, if one British Government department criticised the imports of another department at the meetings of these Councils, our Allies might reasonably view our importation programmes with jealousy and suspicion.

The War Cabinet approved of the allocation of the estimated 40,000,000 tonnage, suggested by Minister of Munitions, in the following way:

During the first six months of the cereal year—

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Food</th>
<th>Munitions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>...</td>
<td>10,000,000</td>
</tr>
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</table>

During the second six months—

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Food</th>
<th>Munitions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12,000,000</td>
<td>8,000,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

40,000,000
They further agreed that the situation should be reviewed again towards the end of the first half-year, when the Ministry of Food might require a bigger programme.

(Initialled) A. E. L.

2, Whitehall Gardens, S.W., October 1, 1918.
APPENDIX.

Notes by the Ministry of Munitions on Inter-Allied Munitions Tonnage.

1. The decision come in to Paris to ask for 19,000,000 tons of imports left open the question as to the basis on which orders should be placed.

If all the Committees of the Council have to start work again on making entirely new programmes, a delay of six months will be caused, which will nullify the policy of the Council to get in munitions during the winter in priority over food. It is therefore necessary that the work which has been done up to the present by the Committees should form the basis of orders with practically no change, if it can be arranged.

The following is a suggestion as to the way in which this may be done:

2. In view of the reduction in nitrate imports in Chili, the Secretary, Maritime Council, is of the opinion that the tonnage available for food and munitions, on a basis of normal tonnage, can be raised to 40,000,000. It is understood that 22,000,000 for food is the bed-rock figure, leaving 18,000,000 for munitions.

It is suggested that the allocation should be 10,000,000 for food and 10,000,000 for munitions in the first six months and 12,000,000 for food and 8,000,000 for munitions in the second six months. If this is accepted, the problem is to find an immediate basis for placing orders on the programmes as already formulated, while keeping the figures down to 10,000,000 during the next six months.

3. It is suggested that the following figures meet the case:

(Figures in Thousands.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Programme as put forward</th>
<th>Proposed Amendment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ore</td>
<td>3,210</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nitrate</td>
<td>390</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pyrites</td>
<td>621</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iron and steel</td>
<td>3,442</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phosphate rock</td>
<td>672</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other articles</td>
<td>2,503</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>11,338</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The basis on which this cut is made is indicated in the following paragraphs:

4. The stocks of nitrate in Europe at the present moment are well over 300,000 tons. These stocks could easily be drawn upon to the extent of 90,000 tons. Moreover, there is an undisclosed reserve in Europe in the fact that both France and Italy are including considerable quantities of nitrate for agricultural purposes in their budgets.

5. A million and a quarter of the programmes for the half-year consist of phosphate rock and pyrites. Very little phosphate rock imported now will affect the harvest of 1919. It is suggested that, in order to get in munitions for next year's campaign, this item should practically be eliminated in view of—

(a.) The possibility that the war may be continued into 1920; and

(b.) The fact that if it is so continued there is certain to be in that year a very much larger tonnage than at present, and this can be used for importing the food which the phosphate rock is intended to produce in the 1920 harvest.

It is therefore suggested that the phosphate rock should be cut to one-third during the next six months in each of the three countries' budgets. This will permit a consequential reduction of; approximately, 200,000 tons of pyrites imported by France and Great Britain, in the proportions of 110,000 by Great Britain and 90,000 tons by France.

6. As regards iron and steel, it is suggested that the Italian situation would be adequately met by continuing throughout the cereal year the importation which they are asking for the last quarter of 1918, instead of allowing an increased import from 100,000 tons a month this year to 140,000 tons a month next year.
If this is accepted, it gives a reduction of 120,000 tons in respect of January, February, and March next year.

It is suggested also that Great Britain should leave over for the present the 15,000 tons a month of plates which are asked for for Admiralty purposes, in view of the stocks now held. This would give a relief of 90,000 tons.

In all other respects it is suggested that the Iron and Steel Programme should be put through as drafted.

There remain 400,000 tons, which it is suggested should be borne by the three countries in proportion to the totals they have put in respectively under the heading of “Miscellaneous Imports” not criticised by any Committee. This would take 230,000 tons from France, 120,000 from Great Britain, and 50,000 from Italy.

7. If this general scheme is agreed, it would leave the budgets for the three countries on the following basis for the six months: the columns marked “A” being figures put forward in Paris, those marked “B” are figures now proposed:

(Figures in Thousands.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>France</th>
<th>Great Britain</th>
<th>Italy</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A.</td>
<td>B.</td>
<td>A.</td>
<td>B.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ore</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>3,150</td>
<td>3,150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nitrate</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pyrites</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>488</td>
<td>358</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iron and steel</td>
<td>2,810</td>
<td>2,810</td>
<td>670</td>
<td>590</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phosphate rock</td>
<td>252</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>360</td>
<td>196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other items reviewed by Committee</td>
<td>633</td>
<td>633</td>
<td>761</td>
<td>761</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
<td>553</td>
<td>323</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>4,063</td>
<td>3,531</td>
<td>5,855</td>
<td>5,270</td>
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</table>