Minutes of a Meeting of the War Cabinet held at 10, Downing Street, S.W., on Wednesday, October 16, 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. the Earl of Reading, G.C.B., K.C.V.O., K.C., His Majesty's High Commissioner and Special Ambassador to the United States of America (for Minutes 1-17).


The Right Hon. W. S. Churchill, M.P., Minister of Munitions (for Minute 9-17).

Major-General J. E. B. Seely, C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O., M.P., Deputy Minister of Munitions (for Minute 12).

Sir J. M. Dodds, K.C.B., Under-Secretary for Scotland (for Minute 16).

Sir H. C. Monro, K.C.B., Permanent Secretary, Local Government Board (for Minute 16).

The Right Hon. Lord Weir, Secretary of State for the Royal Air Force (for Minute 17).

The Right Hon. W. Long, M.P., Secretary of State for the Colonies (for Minutes 1-17).

Rear-Admiral Sir W. R. Hall, K.C.M.G., C.B., Director of Intelligence Division, Admiralty (for Minutes 1-10).


The Right Hon. G. H. Roberts, M.P., Minister of Labour (for Minute 17).


Sir D. J. Shackleton, K.C.B., Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Labour (for Minute 17).

The Right Hon. Sir A. Stanley, M.P., President of the Board of Trade (for Minute 17).

The Right Hon. C. Addison, M.D., M.P., Minister of Reconstruction (for Minute 17).


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

Captain L. F. Burgess, Assistant Secretary.

Mr. Thomas Jones, Assistant Secretary.
1. The Chief of the Imperial General Staff said that there was no information beyond that contained in the morning's telegrams, which had been circulated.

2. The Chief of the Imperial General Staff said that the Germans had only two fresh divisions in reserve on the whole front, but, so far, it had not been possible to locate either of them, and there was a possibility that these two divisions had been disbanded for draft-finding purposes. The Germans had disbanded twenty divisions in all, leaving them with a total of 183, and, in addition, there were eight Austrian divisions. General Wilson was not certain as to the exact number of Allied divisions, but the French now claimed to have 102, we possessed a nominal 61, the United States 38, of which 29 were trained, Belgium 6, and Italy 2. In answer to a question as to whether the reduction of the German forces in Finland, the Ukraine, and elsewhere, would make any appreciable change in the situation on the Western front, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff said that the Germans had already reduced their forces in these places to a very great extent, and he did not think that a further depletion would affect the situation in France.

3. The Chief of the Imperial General Staff then gave an appreciation of the present military situation on the Western front. The French army, he said, was extremely fatigued, and the British army was very tired, both armies needing rest, whilst the American army was hampered in its mobility by the inexperience of its staff. The Germans, on the other hand, were the most fatigued of all the armies fighting on the Western front. In these conditions, and with the imminent approach of the mud rendering further movement very difficult, it was not easy to forecast what results it would be possible for the Allies to achieve before the approaching end of the fighting season. In reply to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, General Wilson said that it was a legitimate deduction from his remarks that there was nothing to warrant the assumption that the present military situation justified the Germans in giving in. In answer to a question as to what would be the position if no decisive result was obtained in the next three weeks, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff said that the enemy would, in the north, probably take up his position behind the Scheldt to Valenciennes, with his right on Ghent, and that south of Valenciennes the enemy would have to remain on the uplands as far as the Aisne. The Chief of the Imperial General Staff gave a sketch of the forthcoming military operations in the Western theatre.

4. The Chief of the Imperial General Staff said that we were doing well in Flanders, and were now three kilometres north-east of Courtrai, and that if we succeeded in capturing the hill just north-west of Thourout, Ostend, Bruges, and the railway between those two places would come under the fire of our guns. Between the Lys and the Scarpe the enemy was retiring slowly. Further to the south the French were following up the enemy whenever he retired.

5. The Chief of the Imperial General Staff stated that General Allenby had reached Homs, 120 miles from Aleppo.

6. The Chief of the Imperial General Staff said that General Marshall was going to push on towards Mosul.
Bulgaria.

7. The Chief of the Imperial General Staff then gave the composition of General Milne's force in Bulgaria, and also outlined to the War Cabinet the readjustments of forces that were taking place between the various Eastern and Mediterranean theatres of war.

The Italian Front: Lord Cavan's Command.

8. The Chief of the Imperial General Staff informed the War Cabinet that Lord Cavan had now been given the command of an army on the Italian front. This position gave Lord Cavan the advantage of direct access to General Diaz, which he had not possessed when commanding a corps.

Steamship "Dundalk."

9. The Director of Naval Intelligence stated that the steamship "Dundalk" was torpedoed and sunk 5 miles N.N.W. of the Skerries on the evening of the 14th October. Seven survivors had been landed at Holyhead.

Loss of a British Submarine.

10. The Director of Naval Intelligence reported that the British submarine "J 5" had been sunk by the special service vessel "Cymric," 38 miles from Coquet Island, one officer and fifteen men being drowned. The Director of Naval Intelligence said that this unfortunate accident might have been due to the failure of the special service vessel to observe the recognition signal of our submarine. A special enquiry had been ordered.

East Africa.

11. The War Cabinet approved of the recommendations of the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, as contained in Paper G.T.-5960, with regard to the reduction of the command and force now conducting the East African campaign.

Gallipoli Decorations.

12. With reference to War Cabinet 476, Minute 13, the War Cabinet had before them the Report of the Committee appointed by War Cabinet 478, Minute 10, to consider all the problems involved in granting decorations for operations during the War, on the question of the issue of a decoration in connection with the operations in Gallipoli (Appendix).

General Seely said that he thought the recommendations of the Committee indicated the only possible way out of the difficult situation which had been created. General Seely now asked the War Cabinet to agree to the Report, in order that the Secretary of State for the Colonies might telegraph to the Dominions for their assent to the proposals. In reply to a question, General Seely said that the Army Council had concurred in the principles of the Report.

The War Cabinet agreed to the recommendations of General Seely's Committee, and congratulated him on arriving at a solution of a very difficult problem, which promised to satisfy all concerned. They asked General Seely to arrange with the War Office that any announcement of this decision, in Parliament or elsewhere, should be withheld until the Secretary of State for the Colonies had been able to ascertain whether it was acceptable to the Dominions.

Allied Maritime Transport Council.

13. With reference to War Cabinet 473, Minute 12, the War Cabinets approved the decisions of the fourth session of the Allied Maritime Transport Council held on the 30th September, 1st and 2nd October, 1918 (Paper G.T.-5932).
Transport of American Troops.

The Shipping Problem.

14. With reference to War Cabinet 459, Minute 8, Lord Reading said that, as requested by the War Cabinet, he had, in collaboration with the Shipping Controller, fully examined the problem of providing transport for the conveyance of American divisions, or their equivalent, and their enquiries had eventually culminated in the arrangement which had been concluded at the Fourth Session of the Allied Maritime Transport Council, by which 500,000 tons of shipping had been allocated for the American army programme for October, November, and December—this tonnage being inclusive of 200,000 tons already arranged (Paper G.T.—5932, Section 12).

The War Cabinet took note of the decision of the Allied Maritime Transport Council, which completed Lord Reading's investigation.

15. Lord Robert Cecil intimated that he was circulating to the War Cabinet a statement of the shipping problem, covering a memorandum by the Allied Maritime Transport Council (Paper G.T.—5958). The Minister of Shipping and he were agreed that the shipping situation, so far from improving, was becoming worse, and that some public declaration, calling for the strictest economy, was necessary. The transport of American troops more than offset the advantage from increased shipbuilding. In issuing any public announcement, its reaction on the international situation, and particularly the encouragement it might give to the enemy at the present critical juncture, had to be borne in mind.

The War Cabinet instructed—

The Secretary to place the subject on the Agenda for the following day.

Representation of the People Act, 1918.

16. With reference to War Cabinet 482, Minute 9, the War Cabinet had under consideration a memorandum by the President of the Local Government Board in connection with the dates of the second register (Paper G.T.—5943).

The President of the Local Government Board explained that, under the Act, the normal Spring register, which relates to a qualifying period of six months ending on the 15th January, would be due to come into force on the 15th April, and that the Autumn register, which relates to a qualifying period of six months ending on the 15th July, would come into force on the 15th October. The only change which was proposed in the memorandum which had been submitted by him was that the second register should come into operation on the 15th May, 1919, instead of 15th April, 1919. If approval were given to this proposal, the result would be that a far better register would be possible than if it were decided not to depart from the Act under which the register would normally come into force on the 15th April. Mr. Hayes Fisher explained that the difficulties at present experienced with regard to printing, shortage of staff, shortage of paper, &c., were enormous, and that parts of the first register were not even published yet. The only difficulty which might ensue, if this proposed change were adopted, would be that, if a General Election occurred between the 15th April and the 15th May, next year, such an Election would take place on the first register instead of on the second.

It was generally agreed that, while on general grounds it was inadvisable to depart from the dates laid down in the Representation of the People Act, 1918, it was desirable that the second register should be as complete as possible.

Mr. Hayes Fisher said that the Secretary for Scotland fully concurred in the proposals which he was submitting, and that
Ireland was not affected, as there was only one register a year in that country.

The War Cabinet decided that—

The second register under the Representation of the People Act, 1918, should come into operation on May 15, 1919, instead of April 15, 1919, as laid down in the Act.

17. With reference to War Cabinet 482, Minute 13, the War Cabinet had before them the following documents:

- Draft Bill, with covering letter by the Minister of Munitions (Paper G.T.-5617).
- Memorandum by the President of the Board of Trade (Paper G.T.-5957).
- Note by Lord Weir (Paper G.T.-5974).
- Memorandum by Dr. Addison (Paper G.T.-5992).

The Minister of Reconstruction said that the Government had given pledges on numerous occasions which they were morally bound to make good. He was not specially enamoured of the Bill which had been prepared, but he was in favour of some such Bill, and the need for the Bill was becoming increasingly urgent. The Government might, at any moment, find themselves concluding an armistice, and difficulties would immediately arise with the Trade Unions. They would insist they had agreed to dilution for war-work only, and would refuse to work on material which was intended for use in the reconstruction period. In his view the Draft Bill should be discussed with representatives of the employers and the Trade Unions, and a definite undertaking should be given in advance that the Government fully intended to redeem its pledges by Act of Parliament. On the basis of such an undertaking he thought it might be possible to secure some compromise during the armistice period. In his view theDraft Bill should be discussed with representatives of the employers and the Trade Unions, and a definite undertaking should be given in advance that the Government fully intended to redeem its pledges by Act of Parliament. On the basis of such an undertaking he thought it might be possible to secure some compromise during the armistice period. In his view the Draft Bill should be discussed with representatives of the employers and the Trade Unions, and a definite undertaking should be given in advance that the Government fully intended to redeem its pledges by Act of Parliament. On the basis of such an undertaking he thought it might be possible to secure some compromise during the armistice period.

The Minister of Labour agreed that the employers were equally keen with the men to obtain a Bill, and in his view a Bill was absolutely indispensable, and he had recently pledged himself to a deputation from the Trade Union Congress to do his utmost to secure the passage of such a Bill. Wherever he went he found the Government’s delay in this matter to be one of the most active causes of industrial unrest, and further delay would tend to rally the reasonable elements among the workmen to the support of extremists. The exact terms of the Bill might require further consideration, but without a Bill there could be no negotiations with the Trade Unions.

The Minister of Munitions did not think there was any great or widespread pressure on behalf of a Bill. He had within the last few days met with no opposition when he had explained to bodies of workmen that it was impossible to redeem the Government’s pledges. The War Cabinet was being asked to approve a Bill which was absurd and vicious. It was a Bill to entrench a number of small and close corporations in restraint of trade, and would probably meet with the resistance of the great majority of the unskilled and women workers. When hostilities ceased, the State would be faced with the enormous task of bringing the armies home and of transferring the labour of women, and during that period the Government must retain control of industrial conditions. He should like to see an attempt made by the Government to come to terms with Labour for a reconstruction period of, say, two years, during which special conditions of control would be in force. This might be done by a.
National Conference, at which problems of wages and conditions of production might be examined, and a charter for Labour drawn up. If such a charter were secured and given a trial, he was satisfied that the resulting material prosperity during the transition period would be so great that there would not be the slightest desire on the part of anyone to revert to pre-war conditions. If it were decided to proceed with the Bill, it should be put in charge of Ministers who believed in it. He himself did not, but the officers of his Department would give every possible help in advancing the Bill if it were decided to proceed with it.

The Secretary of State for Air said that he spoke without political experience, and was only concerned with safeguarding the national interest. Whatever procedure was adopted, the dominating issue should be to preserve the great progress in productive methods brought about by the war. He agreed with Mr. Churchill that an effort should be made to persuade Labour to take a larger view, both of their opportunities and their responsibilities. In the negotiations which had already taken place it was possible that the issues had been too narrowly defined and had been restricted to the fulfilment of pledges. He would prefer that the Government should meet Labour quite frankly and openly, and should explain the Government’s concern to encourage industrial conditions in the future which would provide large production, abundant employment, and a decent level of life for the workers.

Sir David Shackleton said that the Munitions of War Acts did in some measure meet the case of the Trade Unions, but they did not cover the period from the Treasury agreement to the date of the Bill, nor did they provide for the agreements which had been concluded outside the munitions industries. There were three groups of workmen, whose attitude varied: the extremists, who would be delighted if no Bill were forthcoming, and who could then point to the Government repudiation of solemn pledges; a second group, consisting of Trade Unions who had been reluctant to give up pre-war practices; and a third group, who had met the Government fairly generously. If Mr. Churchill’s advice were taken, the Government would be giving the best treatment to those who had helped them least. The promises of the Government were clear and definite, and should be fulfilled. That was the view taken by the employers, and was the unanimous view of the members of Mr. Justice McCardie’s Committee. With regard to post-war conditions, representative employers had assured him that they wished to deal with the workmen themselves, with a minimum of Government interference or regulation. It was true that the workmen wanted the Bill in order to use it as a bargaining instrument; but he did not think their attitude to improvements would be unreasonable, as was shown by a recent declaration by the General Secretary of the Boilermakers’ Society with reference to the use of pneumatic tools. That declaration was typical of the line which would be taken by the Trade Union leaders. The Bill had been prepared by an Interdepartmental Conference, and he supported it. In reply to a suggestion, Sir David thought it would be useful to obtain the view taken of it by some representative employers. In any case, before introducing the Bill, an effort should be made to secure general support for it.

Sir Albert Stanley said that he thought the form of the present Bill left much to be desired, but he was of opinion that it would be necessary to introduce some Bill in order to placate the Trade Unionists.

The War Cabinet decided that—

(a.) In the absence of the Prime Minister, no decision should be taken on the question of policy involved, or on the merits of the Draft Bill.

(b.) In the meantime, as a preliminary step and without prejudice to the final decision, the Minister of Labour should
ascertain privately the view taken of the Draft Bill by the three employers who were members of Mr. Justice McCardie's Committee. No action in this matter to be taken until the Secretary of the War Cabinet had obtained the Prime Minister's approval.

18. The War Cabinet had under consideration a memorandum by the President of the Board of Trade with reference to a proposed enquiry in regard to profits in relation to the cost of living (Paper G.T.-3520).

The War Cabinet approved the recommendations contained in the memorandum, subject to the concurrence of the Minister of Food.

2, Whitehall Gardens, S.W.,
October 16, 1918.
APPENDIX

Report of Committee Appointed to Consider all the Problems Involved in Granting Decorations for Operations during the War on the Question of the Issue of a Decoration in Connection with the Operations in Gallipoli.

Major-General Right Hon. J. E. B. Seely, C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O., M.P. (Deputy Minister of Munitions) (Chairman).
Rear-Admiral A. F. Everett, C.B. (Naval Secretary to the First Lord of the Admiralty).
Sir Oswyn A. R. Murray, K.C.B. (Permanent Secretary to the Admiralty).
Sir Reginald H. Brade, K.C.B. (Secretary of the War Office).
The Right Hon. Sir F. Ponsonby, K.C.B.
Lieutenant-General Sir H. V. Cox, K.C.M.G., C.B., C.S.I.
Brigadier-General W. W. Warner, C.B. (The Director of Air Personal Services, Air Ministry).
Brevet Colonel C. H. Frith.

1. The Committee was appointed by the War Cabinet in consequence of the strong objections raised not only by members of Parliament and the press, but also by the Dominion troops themselves, to the issue of any decoration to Dominion troops which would not also be conferred on their British comrades who shared the same dangers and hardships in the same theatre of war.

2. The Committee considered fully various alternative proposals, in particular, the suggestion that a special decoration should be granted for the operations in Gallipoli. They came to the conclusion that it was impossible to grant a separate decoration for any particular operation without creating anomalies even more serious than those which exist at present. The Committee, however, understand from the War Office representatives that clasps for particular operations to be granted on the war medal will include a clasp for Gallipoli.

3. The Committee recommend—

(1.) That the 1914 Star, in its present form, should be granted under the conditions now approved as defined in Army Order 350 of 1917.

(2.) That the 1914 Star, with the same ribbon, but bearing an altered date 1914-15, should be extended to all those ineligible for the 1914 Star who served in the campaign in a theatre of war prior to 5th August, 1915, and that it should be granted to all those who arrived in such theatre of war on duty and with proper authority prior to that date.

(3.) That the term “theatre of war” should be defined by the Army Council, in consultation with the Admiralty and Air Board, thus including, amongst others:

(a.) All the Australian and New Zealand troops who fought in Gallipoli, as well as all the British and Indian troops who were on the Peninsula, with very few exceptions.

(b.) The 1st Canadian Division, the Canadian Cavalry Brigade, and the early reinforcements of both, who fought at the second battle of Ypres, and at the battle of Festubert.

(c.) All those who fought in German South-West Africa, and nearly all the Indian troops who fought in East Africa.

(d.) All the British, Dominion, and Indian troops who fought in the defence of Egypt.

(e.) All officers and other ratings of the Royal Navy and the Royal Marines who served on a ship at sea during the first year of the war.

(f.) All members of the Flying Services fulfilling the prescribed conditions. Seeing that during the period referred to the R.A.F. was divided between the Naval and Military wings,
allocations to officers and men of each wing should be made, on
the recommendation of the Air Board, on the same basis as is
recommended above for officers and men of the Navy and Army
respectively.

4. In making the recommendations above, the Committee have fully realised the
objections to any extension of the grant of the 1914 Star, not only in the interests of
the present holders, but also because of the probability of demands for further
extensions. But, in view of the fact that the decoration has already been given to
nearly 400,000 persons, many of whom had not seen service in the fighting line, they
consider that its extension to include those who fought in the operations at
Gallipoli, and in the second battle of Ypres, cannot be held to detract from the
distinction which it carries. Under the circumstances, after full consideration of the
various alternatives (which are dealt with in an Appendix), the Committee are of
opinion that the solution they recommend is the best one.

5. The recommendations of the Committee can only be adopted with the concurrence
of the Dominion Governments. The Committee hope this concurrence may be
secured, since they are confident that the grant of one decoration to all those who
shared the same dangers and hardships will be more acceptable to the troops than any
distinctive decoration confined to men of one Dominion.

APPENDIX.

The considerations which led the Committee to put forward the recommendations
contained in their report were as follows:

Existing Situation.
The 1914 Star is now granted to all officers, N.C.O.'s, and men borne on the
establishment of a unit of the British Expeditionary Forces who served in France
between the 5th August, 1914, and midnight of 22/23 November, 1914. These
conditions, as defined in Army Order 350 of 1917, exclude practically the whole of the
Dominion forces, who came forward voluntarily at the beginning of the war, and took
part in important operations at an early stage of the war, notably the first landing on
the Gallipoli Peninsula. The objections to this arrangement were represented at the
Conference of Prime Ministers in 1917, and it was agreed that each of the Dominions
might issue a decoration to their own troops with the full assent of the Imperial
Government.

The objections to this proposal, involving the issue of separate decorations to
Dominion troops for particular campaigns for which the British troops engaged received
none, have hitherto prevented any action being taken.

It was to recommend a solution to this situation, having due regard to the claims
of the Dominion forces and the present holders of the 1914 Star, that this Committee
has been formed.

Proposals Considered.

1. The first proposal considered by the Committee was to issue a separate
decoration for the Gallipoli campaign, which should be common to all the troops,
British, Dominion, and Indian, who took part in the campaign. After full consideration
they came to the conclusion that it would be impossible to authorise a special decoration
to the Australian and other troops who served in Gallipoli and at the same time to
refuse the grant of a similar special decoration to the Canadian and other troops who
took part in the battle of Festubert. If separate decorations were granted in each of
these cases irresistible demands for the issue of an indefinite number of further campaign
decorations would be made on behalf of the troops who served in Mesopotamia, Africa,
&c., &c. In short, the difficulty of selecting particular campaigns for the granting of a
special decoration and the anomalies that would be created by any such selection are so
great that this proposal is considered impracticable.

2. The second proposal was to encourage the Dominion Governments to issue a
special Dominion Star to their own troops, a similar decoration being issued by the
Imperial Government to the Imperial troops who served during the same period.
Enquiries were made with a view to obtaining a representative opinion from the
Australian, New Zealand, Canadian, South African, and Newfoundland authorities as to whether they would prefer a special Dominion Star to a decoration which would be held in common by all troops, British, Indian, and Dominion.

It is ascertained that both General Turner and General Smuts had stated most emphatically that they were certain that all the Canadian and South African troops would far rather have a decoration which could be shared by the British and Indian troops who served with them. On this point they were most insistent, both saying that many officers and men would prefer to have no decoration at all than to have one which was not also given to their comrades. They also both agreed that the 1914 Star extended to 1915 would in itself be more acceptable than any special Dominion decoration, and this view is understood to be shared by the Newfoundland troops.

As regards the Australians and New Zealanders, from enquiries made, it appears that they take the same view, with the one possible exception that they would prefer a Dominion ribbon to the ribbon of the 1914 Star.

The Committee realises to the full that great objection may be raised to any solution proposed, and that it might, in fact, probably would, be far better not to issue any decoration on the lines of the 1914 Star, owing to the fact that continual extensions might be demanded, but after full consideration, they are satisfied that their present proposals contain the only satisfactory solution of the existing situation.

Advantages of Proposals.

The advantages of these proposals are:

1. That they entirely remove the anomaly of troops serving in the same theatre of war, side by side, not receiving the same reward for their services.

2. That they give to nearly all those who first responded to the call of duty a decoration which would be extremely highly prized, and which hitherto has been confined only to those who rendered this service in France. To this the Committee attach the greatest importance.

3. That they remove the existing anomaly, by which the 1914 Star is issued to many thousands of officers and men whose duties kept them at a base in France far away from the fighting line, whereas those men offered their services at the beginning of the war, and took part in the fighting at Gallipoli or Festubert, are ineligible for any special decoration.

4. That the grant, by the King himself, of one decoration to British Dominion and Indian troops alike symbolises the unity of the Empire.