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SECRET.

127

WAR CABINET, 488.

Minutes of a Meeting of the War Cabinet held at 10, Downing Street, S.W., on Thursday, October 17, 1918, at 11.30 A.M.

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. G. N. BARNES, M.P.	The Right Hon. A. CHAMBERLAIN, M.P.
The Right Hon. A. BONAR LAW, 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 5).	Admiral SIR R. E. WEYMSS, G.C.B., C.M.G., M.V.O., First Sea Lord and Chief of the Naval Staff (for Minutes 1 to 4).
The Right Hon. LORD R. CECIL, K.C., M.P., Assistant Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs (for Minutes 1 to 7).	The Right Hon. SIR J. MACLAY, Bart., Shipping Controller (for Minute 6).
The Right Hon. the EARL OF READING, G.C.B., K.C.V.O., His Majesty's High Commissioner and Special Ambassador to the United States of America.	SIR R. S. HORNE, K.B.E., K.C. Third Civil Lord of the Admiralty (for Minute 9).
The Right Hon. the VISCOUNT MILNER, G.C.B., G.C.M.G., Secretary of State for War (for Minutes 1 to 4).	The Right Hon. SIR A. STANLEY, M.P., President, Board of Trade (for Minutes 8 and 9).
General SIR H. H. WILSON, K.C.B., D.S.O., Chief of the Imperial General Staff (for Minutes 1 to 4).	The Right Hon. C. ADDISON, M.D., M.P., Minister of Reconstruction (for Minutes 8 and 9).
The Right Hon. WALTER H. LONG, M.P., Secretary of State for the Colonies (for Minutes 1 to 5).	The Right Hon. SIR A. C. GEDDES, K.C.B., M.P., Minister of National Service (for Minute 9).
The Right Hon. the MARQUIS OF SALISBURY, K.G., G.C.V.O., C.B. (for Minute 8).	The Right Hon. SIR F. E. SMITH, K.C., M.P., Attorney-General (for Minute 7).
	SIR J. S. BRADBURY, K.C.B., Joint Permanent Secretary, Treasury (for Minute 8).

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

Captain CLEMENT JONES, *Assistant Secretary.*

Major the Hon. W. ORMSBY-GORE, M.P., *Assistant Secretary.*

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

Mr. THOMAS JONES, *Assistant Secretary.*

Preparation of
Brief for Peace
Conference.

1. THE War Cabinet gave some preliminary consideration to the preparations required for an eventual Peace Conference. It was pointed out that an International Peace Conference would probably be preceded by a Conference between the Allied Governments. This might be even more important than the Peace Conference itself, since the Allies would probably be in a position to impose the terms upon which they themselves had agreed.

It was agreed that a brief should be drawn up for those who might have to attend such an Allied Conference.

The Prime Minister stated that he was enquiring for the services of a suitable man, preferably a lawyer, who could consolidate the material prepared by various Government Departments whose duty it was to prepare our case in detail.

After some discussion the War Cabinet invited Lord Reading to suggest for their consideration the name of a suitable man, in order to bring together the material available in a concentrated form.

In connection with the preparation of this brief, the War Cabinet agreed—

- (a.) That the Secretary of State for War should have a memorandum prepared setting forth the total contribution made and casualties incurred by the British Empire and its Allies respectively, giving the figures for each theatre of war separately;
- (b.) That the Admiralty should prepare a statement of the naval effort made by the British Empire and its Allies during the war, and the casualties incurred, differentiating in the same manner as the War Office memorandum;
- (c.) That similar memoranda should be submitted by—
 - The Air Ministry, in regard to aerial effort;
 - The Treasury, in regard to financial effort;
 - The Ministry of Shipping, in regard to shipping effort;
- (d.) That the Board of Trade, in consultation with other Departments concerned, should prepare a memorandum on the economic considerations involved.

The War Cabinet also agreed that it was very desirable that they should be in a position to have clearly in their minds a complete statement of our *desiderata* in regard to the disposal of territory taken from the enemy.

It was decided that—

The Foreign Office and the Colonial Office should prepare a statement of our case in regard to the territories in question for early consideration by the War Cabinet.

The Western
Front.

2. The Chief of the Imperial General Staff informed the War Cabinet that Belgian forces had reached the milestone 12 kilometres from Ostend, and were advancing on that place with little opposition. It was probable that the enemy on this portion of the front would have to retire to the Dutch frontier.

The Chief of the Imperial General Staff stated that the British IVth Army and the French 1st Army attacked at 9.30 that morning on a front of 30 kilometres between Le Cateau and Mont d'Origny. According to information received at 11 o'clock, we had progressed about 2 or 3 kilometres, and the French had taken 1,000 prisoners at Mont d'Origny.

The Chief of the Imperial General Staff said that General Plumer's army had now turned south, had crossed the Lys, and was moving towards Lille.

Ostend.

3. The First Sea Lord stated that a force had been organised by the Admiralty for the reconstruction of the Port of Ostend, and would commence work as soon as the town fell into our hands.

Armistice with Turkey.

4. With reference to War Cabinet 486, Minute 2, the question was raised as to whether President Wilson contemplated replying to the note addressed to him by the Turks on the question of peace.

It was suggested that a telegram might be sent to the President, saying that we believed the Turks to be on the point of collapse, and the situation would be greatly improved as soon as an armistice was concluded, and that we should suggest to the President that, in his reply to the Turkish note, he might inform the Turks that General Allenby was in a position to negotiate an armistice.

It was pointed out, however, that, if we asked the President to instruct the Turks to approach General Allenby, it might be thought that we were endeavouring to steal a march on the French, especially as the French did not know that we had sent the terms of a Turkish armistice to General Allenby.

The War Cabinet decided that—

The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs should send a telegram to Washington in the sense that President Wilson, in reply to the Turkish request for his intervention, should advise the Turks to make an application for an armistice to the commander of one of the naval or military forces operating against the Turks, and that the telegram should draw attention to the advantages of concluding an armistice with the Turks as soon as possible, amongst which would be the moral effect on Germany and the opening of the Black Sea.

The Shipping Problem.

5. With reference to War Cabinet 487, Minute 15, the Cabinet further considered the question of issuing to the public a statement of the shipping position, as recommended by the Allied Maritime Transport Council (Paper G.T.-5988).

Lord Robert Cecil stated that, although there was an improvement in the general war situation, there was no improvement in the shipping situation. He was informed that there had been a considerable increase in the consumption of food in last few weeks, and, in order to prevent subsequent hardship, should the war continue, it was desirable to warn the public against waste.

Sir Joseph Maclay thought that perhaps, in view of the uncertainty of the international situation at the moment, it might be wise to delay the publication of the statement for a short time.

The War Cabinet decided—

To postpone the issue of the statement for the present, and requested—

Lord Robert Cecil to raise the matter again, should he deem it necessary.

Offences against the Law by Enemy Individuals.

6. The War Cabinet had before them a letter from the Law Officers of the Crown to the Prime Minister, dealing with offences against the law by enemy individuals (Paper G.T.-5956).

The Attorney-General said that the matter had been raised because not only in this country, but also in France and the United States it had been explicitly announced that, in cases where grave offences against the law could be proved against enemy individuals, punishment should be demanded. He understood that certain records had been kept at the Foreign Office and at the War Office, and it was desirable that such records and all relevant materials should be collected and examined for the purpose of showing who

are the individuals charged, what are the offences charged against them, and what is, in each case, the available evidence in support of the charge. In consultation with the Solicitor-General, he had drawn up a list of persons versed in International Law and the Law of Evidence, who might form a suitable Committee to collate the material.

It was suggested that the Government also needed advice as to the nature and composition of any tribunal that it might be thought desirable to set up for the trial of such offences, and the Committee might also consider that point.

The War Cabinet decided—

- (a.) To approve the appointment of the Committee proposed by the Law Officers, who should draft its terms of reference, and take the necessary action to set up the Committee;
- (b.) The Committee should consider the nature and composition of any tribunal that it might be necessary to set up to deal with the offences under consideration;
- (c.) The appointment of the Committee should not be made public.

Post-War Disposal
of Surplus
Government
Property.

7. With reference to War Cabinet 298, Minute 3, the War Cabinet had before them a copy of a resolution passed by the Surplus Government Property Advisory Council on the 10th October, 1918 (Paper G.T.-5949, amended), together with a memorandum by the Chancellor of the Exchequer (Paper G.T.-6002), and a memorandum by the Minister of Reconstruction (Paper G.T.-6003), dealing with certain administrative difficulties which had arisen in connection with the composition and powers of the body, or bodies, which should be charged with the disposal of Government stores at the end of the war.

The War Cabinet decided that—

Mr. Chamberlain should settle the question in consultation with a Committee composed as follows:—

Mr. Chamberlain (*Chairman*),
Lord Salisbury,
Sir Eric Geddes,
Lord Milner,
Lord Weir,
Sir A. Stanley.
Mr. Churchill,
Dr. Addison,
Sir A. Mond,
A Representative of the Treasury,
Mr. Pembroke Wicks (*Secretary*),

to decide upon the best method of obtaining a proper disposal of surplus Government property.

Release before
General
Demobilisation
of "Pivotal" men.

8. With reference to War Cabinet 462, Minute 7, the War Cabinet had before them a memorandum by the Secretary of State for War (Paper G.T.-5448), and memoranda by the Minister of Labour (Papers G.T.-5868 and 6006), dealing with the need of making preliminary arrangements for the demobilisation of "pivotal" men.

The War Cabinet gave their approval to the proposals of the Minister of Labour.

2, Whitehall Gardens, S.W.,
October 17, 1918.