Minutes of a Meeting of the War Cabinet held at 10, Downing Street, S.W., on Monday, November 4, 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. G. N. Barnes, M.P.

Lieutenant-General the Right Hon. J. C. Smuts, K.C.
The Right Hon. A. Chamberlain, M.P.

The following were also present:


Major-General W. Thwaites, C.B., Director of Military Intelligence (for Minutes 1 to 6).

Colonel F. J. Byrne, C.M.G., Secretary, War Priorities Committee (for Minutes 12, and 13).

Rear-Admiral S. R. Fremantle, C.B., M.V.O., Deputy Chief of the Naval Staff (for Minutes 1 to 8).

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


Lieutenant-Colonel W. Dally Jones, C.M.G., Acting Secretary.

Major the Hon. W. Ormsby Gore, M.P., Assistant Secretary.

Captain Clement Jones, Assistant Secretary.

The Western Front.

The Director of Military Intelligence gave a description of the operations on the Western front since Friday, the 1st November. On that day the 1st American Army and the IVth French Army had launched an attack which had developed on an 18-mile front and had penetrated about 12 miles. The Germans were retiring without much fighting. The Allies had captured 5,000 prisoners, mostly on the 3rd November, and about 100 guns. At Valenciennes, on the 1st November, the IIId and IVth British Armies had attacked on a 10-mile front and had penetrated 4 miles. They were now 3 miles beyond Valenciennes, and had captured 2,000 prisoners. To the north, between the Lys and the Scheldt, the British IIId Army had penetrated 10 miles, and were now in the outskirts of Ghent. A telegram had been received that morning to the effect that our 1st, IIId, and IVth Armies had attacked from the north-east of Valenciennes to Oisy, and that the French were attacking from Oisy to south of Guise, on a front of 30 miles. No details had yet
been received, but the attack appeared to be going satisfactorily. Le Quesnoy had been taken.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer said that he understood that this attack was one of the most important operations of all that had yet taken place.

The Director of Military Intelligence, in reply to a question, said that, while it was not expected that any large body of German troops would be cut off, the importance of the attack was due partly to the locality in which the operations were taking place, and partly on account of the scale on which they were being conducted. It was almost certain that, for reasons of man-power, the Germans would be obliged to evacuate Belgium, although they might perhaps pause first on the Antwerp–Namur line.

In this connection, the Deputy Chief of the Naval Staff said that all the German merchant ships which had formerly been at Antwerp had now proceeded to Dutch ports, chiefly Rotterdam.

The Director of Military Intelligence stated that the number of enemy divisions had decreased from 192 to 186. This reduction was accounted for by the fact that one German division had been disbanded, and five Austrian divisions had gone out of the fighting.

The Italian Front.

2. With regard to the terms of armistice, which were to take effect that day from 3 o’clock, the Chancellor of the Exchequer said that, at the request of M. Clemenceau, no announcement would be made in the Houses of Parliament that day, because the French Chamber was not sitting. The statement would be made, probably by the Prime Minister, on the following day. Mr. Bonar Law said it was a matter for consideration whether it would be necessary to read all the geographical details of the terms of armistice.

The Director of Military Intelligence explained, by means of a map, the line to which the Austrians would retire under the armistice.

The Director of Military Intelligence undertook to furnish a paraphrase of the geographical description of the terms of armistice, which could be used in the public statement in the Houses of Parliament.

Macedonia: Constantinople.

3. The Director of Military Intelligence reported that a French regiment had sailed from Dedeagatch to the Dardanelles, and that the 28th British division was embarking at Salonica for the same destination.

Admiral Fremantle said that officers had landed on the Gallipoli Peninsula on the 2nd November, in order to make preliminary arrangements for the occupation of the forts. It was expected to land 6,000 troops on the 6th November. Mine-sweeping operations were now in progress, and it was hoped that the Allied Fleet would go up the Dardanelles on the 9th November. Admiral Calthorpe proposed to anchor in Constantinople, in the first place, and then proceed to the Gulf of Ismid until it was certain that there were no enemy submarines in the Sea of Marmora. An unconfirmed report had been received that the “Goeben” and four German submarines were in Turkish hands. If this report were true, the British fleet would probably be sufficiently strong for the operations contemplated in the Black Sea without the assistance of any French or Italian ships. The French and Italian ships would proceed to Constantinople, but it was not yet clear whether they intended to follow Admiral Calthorpe into the Black Sea. It was proposed to send one small monitor to Smyrna, and in addition we were asking the Italians to release from the Adriatic
one of the British light cruisers, which were working under the
Italian Command.

4. The attention of the Cabinet was drawn to the request of
General Milne that a Commander-in-Chief should be appointed to
command the Allied forces in the Dardanelles.

The Director of Military Intelligence said that this question
was being discussed at Versailles with the Chief of the Imperial
General Staff.

5. The Director of Military Intelligence reported that two
cavalry brigades were close to, and had probably by this
time arrived at, Mosul. 11,000 prisoners and 50 guns had been
captured.

With regard to the situation at Baku, 1,500 men were required,
and it appeared from General Marshall's telegram that they could
be there in a fortnight; but arrangements would have to be made to
replace the brigade thus withdrawn, for the protection of the Resht
district. There was a question whether the best way to Baku
might not be via Batoum. As to any fear that the oil wells might
be destroyed, it was pointed out that the destruction of the wells
would be resisted by the local people, who obtained their subsistence
by working them.

6. With reference to War Cabinet 494, Minute 4, the Director
of Military Intelligence read to the War Cabinet a message of
thanks which had been received from General Marshall in reply to
the congratulations of the War Cabinet.

7. The Secretary of State for India referred to the war effort
of the Government of India in regard to recruiting and material,
and more especially to the great assistance rendered by General
Muuro. He asked that the War Cabinet should authorise him to
send a message of congratulation to the Government of India on
their behalf.

The War Cabinet requested—

The Secretary of State for India to prepare a message of con­
gratulation, for decision on the following day, after the
Prime Minister's return.

8. Admiral Fremantle said that during the last three weeks
three enemy submarines were definitely known to have been sunk.
As regards submarine operations in the North Sea, it was believed
that all enemy submarines were returning, and no further hostile
action had been reported.

9. Mr. Long stated that he had received a telegram from
Canada stating that, in view of the war situation, Sir Robert
Borden proposed to sail for England as soon as possible, and would
probably leave in about a week's time. From South Africa he had
learned that General Botha was expected to leave Cape Town on
the 8th November, and would be in England early in December.

Mr. Montagu asked whether, in view of the re-assembly of the
members of the Imperial War Cabinet, it would not be advisable to
summon the Indian representatives.
Mr. Chamberlain thought that it was very desirable Sir S. Sinha should be summoned as soon as possible.

Mr. Long thought that it would be very necessary to decide at an early date who were actual members of the Imperial War Cabinet. The arrival of General Botha would mean that South Africa would have two representatives, while Mr. Hughes and Sir Joseph Cook were both in this country representing Australia. The other Dominions might therefore seek double representation.

The War Cabinet decided that—

The Secretary of State for India should send a telegram to the Viceroy, urging the attendance in this country of Sir S. Sinha, on behalf of the Government of India, in connection with the preparations for the Peace Conference.

The Supreme War Council.

10. The Chancellor of the Exchequer stated that, in view of the Prime Minister's early return, he did not propose to make a general statement in regard to what had happened at Versailles during the last few days. He would, however, like to state that two matters of importance had not been decided when he had left Versailles. First, the military terms regarding an armistice with Germany had not yet been finally agreed; and secondly, the definition of the phrase “The Freedom of the Seas” had not yet been determined.

In regard to the first, the terms proposed were even more stiff than those originally suggested by Marshal Foch. They included the holding of bridgeheads over the Rhine, with a radius of 30 miles on the east bank, and the Allied occupation of certain cities, such as Cologne. The naval demands were still under discussion, and a question had arisen with regard to the possible surrender of certain ships and the internment of the remainder. It was felt that such a distinction would be liable to misinterpretation by the public, both here and in Germany, and either all should be surrendered or all interned. The Americans had made it quite clear that they did not contemplate the return of any warships to Germany as part of the Peace Terms.

Mr. Chamberlain asked whether any decision had been come to with regard to merchant shipping.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer replied that proposals regarding German merchant shipping were comprised under the head of “Reparation.” It was not considered practicable that the German merchant ships should be handed over to the control of the Allied Maritime Transport Council, as a condition of the armistice.

In regard to American representation, the Chancellor of the Exchequer stated that Colonel House had not attended Versailles as a plenipotentiary, and that his assent was always subject to President Wilson’s decision.

The War Cabinet decided that—

No action was necessary.

Propaganda.

11. Lord Robert Cecil stated that, owing to the vacancy occasioned by the resignation of the Minister of Information, Colonel Buchan had been to see him with regard to the desirability of some general statement being made in regard to our present attitude towards the new German Government and the German people. He gathered that the Ministry of Information attached importance to some statement being made on this subject at an early date.

The War Cabinet decided that—

Government Building and Constructional Work.

12. The War Cabinet had before them a letter from the Secretary of the War Priorities Committee (Paper G.T.-6143) recommending that the only Government Departments which should be empowered to undertake building or constructional work should be the Admiralty.
the War Office, the Ministry of Munitions, and the Air Ministry, and that the duty of carrying out work for other Government Departments should be entrusted to the Office of Works.

Colonel Byrne stated that there was no opposition to the decision of the ad hoc Committee, appointed by the Chairman of the War Priorities Committee, on the part of any Government Departments.

The War Cabinet approved the recommendations of the Chairman of the War Priorities Committee.

13. The War Cabinet had before them a minute from the Secretary of the War Priorities Committee (Paper G.T.-6160), in which the President of the Board of Trade, who had acted as Chairman of the Committee on Unemployment due to Restriction of Industries, appointed by the War Cabinet in January 1918, asked for the authority of the War Cabinet for the dissolution of the Committee. The work formerly undertaken by the Committee had now been absorbed by the larger Committee appointed by War Cabinet 491, Minute 1, and there appeared to be no good grounds for the continuance of its functions as a separate Committee.

The War Cabinet approved the course proposed by the President of the Board of Trade.

14. With reference to War Cabinet 444, Minute 7, the War Cabinet had before them a copy of correspondence between the Civil Service Commissioners and the Treasury in regard to the arrangements as to the suspension from employment in Government service, during the war, of Government employees whose parents are not natural-born British or Allied subjects (Paper G.T.-6100).

The Chancellor of the Exchequer stated that he had given this question his personal attention, and he thought that a clear case had been made out for amending the Government decision in regard to the non-employment in Government service of any person whose parents were not natural-born British subjects in cases where the individual in question had served during the war in His Majesty's armed forces.

The War Cabinet approved the proposal made by the Civil Service Commissioners in their letter dated the 23rd September, 1918 (Paper G.T.-6100), and directed—

The Secretary to call the attention of all Departments concerned to the decision.

2, Whitehall Gardens, S.W.,
November 4, 1918.