WAR CABINET. 505.

Minutes of a Meeting of the War Cabinet held at 10, Downing Street, S.W., on Thursday, November 21, 1918, at 12 noon.

Present:
The Right Hon. A. Bonar Law, M.P. (in the Chair).
The Right Hon. G. N. Barnes, M.P.
The Right Hon. Austen Chamberlain, M.P.

Lieutenant-General the Right Hon. J. C. Smuts, K.C.

The following were also present:
The Right Hon. Lord Robert Cecil, K.C., M.P., Assistant Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.
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.
Major-General P. P. de B. Radcliffe, C.B., D.S.O., Director of Military Operations (for Minutes 1-3).
Brigadier-General G. K. Cockerill, C.B., Sub-Director of Military Intelligence (for Minutes 4 and 5).
The Right Hon. E. Shortt, K.C., M.P., Chief Secretary for Ireland (for Minutes 9-12).
Sir L. Worthington Evans, Bart., M.P., Minister of Blockade (for Minute 7).

Rear-Admiral G. P. W. Hope, C.B., Deputy First Sea Lord (for Minutes 1-4).
The Right Hon. C. Addison, M.D., M.P., Minister of Reconstruction (for Minutes 9-13).
The Right Hon. R. E. Prothero, M.V.O., M.P., President, Board of Agriculture and Fisheries (for Minutes 9-13).
Mr. J. R. Lambert, C.B., Assistant Under-Secretary for Scotland (for Minute 12).
Professor W. G. Adams (for Minutes 9-12).

Major the Hon. W. Ormsby-Gore, M.P., Assistant Secretary.
Captain Clement Jones, Assistant Secretary.
Mr. Thomas Jones, Assistant Secretary.

[1365—505]
1. WITH reference to Imperial War Cabinet 37, Minute 2, the Director of Military Operations said that the opinion at General Headquarters, France, was that there had been a good deal of exaggeration in the newspapers in regard to the German ill-treatment of British prisoners. In front of the British Army, only those prisoners who were working close up to the line, and were abandoned when the German Army broke, were in a destitute condition. Further back, our prisoners were in receipt of three days' rations, and the enemy were doing all they could for them. It had to be remembered that the roads were blocked, and that the Germans were finding it difficult to get back themselves.

The Secretary of State for the Colonies asked whether the War Office had received any information in regard to those British prisoners in Germany who had never yet been identified.

The Director of Military Operations replied that, as far as he knew, there was no information as yet, but that he would ask the Adjutant-General.

2. With reference to War Cabinet 503, Minute 1, the Director of Military Operations said that precise information had now been received respecting General Foch's dispositions in regard to the Army of Occupation. It was proposed that 10 British divisions should be actually in German territory, and 20 British divisions in reserve in France and Belgium; there would be 17 French divisions in German territory, and 20 French divisions in reserve; there would be 9 American divisions in German territory, and 10 in reserve.

General Smuts called attention to the very large number of British troops which it was proposed to employ in the Army of Occupation; indeed, adding the 150,000 troops required for the garrisons of India and the Mediterranean to the proposed 30 divisions for the Army of Occupation, there would be very little demobilisation of the British Army at all; yet the Committee over which he presided were taking steps for demobilisation.

To this the Director of Military Operations replied that until it was absolutely certain that the Germans had laid down their arms, Marshal Foch could not afford to take any risks. It was reasonable to expect a relaxation in regard to the Army of Occupation later on, perhaps by the middle of December, or Christmas, after the bridgeheads on the Rhine had been occupied.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer suggested that the whole question of the Army of Occupation should be discussed in France, and that the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, after his return from his visit to Belgium, should proceed to Paris and discuss the matter there.

3. With reference to War Cabinet 502, Minute 5, and Appendix, whereby the War Cabinet had approved, inter alia, of proceeding with the occupation of the Baku-Batum Railway, the Director of Military Operations said that, in order to clear the Turks out of the region of Batum, it would be necessary to send a Division from General Milne's Army.

The War Cabinet authorised—

The Director of Military Operations to telegraph to General Milne, warning him to be prepared to send a Division to Batum as soon as the naval situation in the Black Sea permitted.

The Secretary of State for the Colonies asked whether it was proposed to use any Dominion troops in connection, because he understood that the Dominion Commanders-in-Chief were making arrangements to repatriate their forces as soon as possible.

The Director of Military Operations replied that it was not intended to use Dominion troops for the occupation of Batum. With
regard to the alternative of using General Allenby's troops instead of General Milne's, the Director of Military Operations said that he did not think the troops in General Milne's force who would now be sent to Batum had been away from home any longer than General Allenby's troops, because, while General Milne's divisions had actually been in the East longer, individuals had changed and the malaria cases, for instance, had come home.

4. The Deputy First Sea Lord read to the War Cabinet a telegram from the Commander-in-Chief of the Grand Fleet, to the effect that the Grand Fleet had that morning met 5 German battle cruisers, 9 battleships, 7 light cruisers, and 49 destroyers of the German High Seas Fleet, which had surrendered for internment and were being brought to the Firth of Forth. Admiral Hope added that 20 German submarines had surrendered to Admiral Tyrwhitt, at Harwich, on the previous day.

5. With reference to Imperial War Cabinet 37, Minute 8, the Secretary asked whether he should write to the representatives of the Dominions to ask them to prepare their case in regard to the captured German Colonies.

The Secretary of State for the Colonies said that the views of the Dominions in this matter had been expressed repeatedly, and he would therefore like first to go through the telegrams on the subject before asking the Dominion representatives to present their case.

The War Cabinet decided—

To leave this question to the discretion of the Secretary of State for the Colonies.

6. With reference to War Cabinet 488, Minute 1, General Smuts said that he would like to know whether the Cabinet as a whole desired to read the brief which had been written, and which had assumed very large proportions. He supposed that the delegates to the Peace Conference would certainly wish to read the brief, but he did not know whether each member would want to see it.

The War Cabinet decided that—

The question should be deferred until further progress had been made with the brief.

7. The War Cabinet had before them two Memoranda by Sir L. Worthington Evans (Papers E.D.D.C.-71 and 73) in regard to blockade questions.

Mr. Chamberlain said that both these papers had been fully discussed by the Economic Defence and Development Committee on the previous day, when the Committee had recommended that the policy outlined in these Memoranda should be adopted by the War Cabinet.

Sir L. Worthington Evans said that, if the policy were agreed to, instructions would have to be given to the Ministry of Blockade, the Board of Trade, the Foreign Trade Department, and the War Trade Department. The Ministry of Blockade should then negotiate to obtain the agreement of the Associated Governments to the policy, and thereupon the other Departments should carry it out.

The War Cabinet agreed to the recommendation of the Economic Defence and Development Committee, that the policy outlined by the Minister of Blockade in his Memoranda should be adopted.
3. The War Cabinet had before them a copy of a letter from the Director of the Press Bureau to the Secretary of the War Cabinet (Paper G.T.-6325), asking whether there could now be a relaxation of censorship rules with regard to the meetings of the War Cabinet and the Inter-Allied Conferences.

The War Cabinet agreed that the censorship in this respect should now be removed.

The Secretary asked whether the War Cabinet desired that formal notices should be issued to the press, giving the names of those present at War Cabinet Meetings.

The War Cabinet decided that—

Such notices should not be issued.

9. The War Cabinet had under consideration a joint note by the Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland and the Chief Secretary for Ireland (Paper G.T.-6298) regarding the release of interned Sinn Fein candidates and the circulation of republican literature. This note suggested that none of those persons at present interned should be released for the purpose of election contests, and suggested, in regard to literature, that it should be left to the Lord-Lieutenant and the Chief Secretary to act as they think best in each case that might arise.

The War Cabinet approved the recommendations of the Lord-Lieutenant and the Chief Secretary.

10. The War Cabinet had before them a joint memorandum by the Lord-Lieutenant and the Chief Secretary for Ireland (Paper G.T.-5858) asking for authority for the use of 2,000,000L for the purpose of industrial and agricultural development in Ireland, such sum to be expended in the form of loans, on the authority of the Government of Ireland, without reference in each particular case to the Treasury.

Mr. Short stated that it was proposed to establish a Committee of the Irish Privy Council, to advise the Lord-Lieutenant with regard to the carrying out of the proposed schemes and other matters, and that the scheme in question was part of a scheme for the establishment of a definite Department of Reconstruction in Ireland. The Minister of Reconstruction, Dr. Addison, had agreed.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer pointed out that Mr. Short's proposal involved a big departure from ordinary Treasury practice, and until the matter had been fully examined by the Treasury officials he could not agree to its submission to the Cabinet for approval.

The Secretary pointed out that in War Cabinet 285, Minute 9, a somewhat similar authority had been given to the then Chief Secretary.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer said that this authority had never been utilised, and at his request—

The War Cabinet postponed the matter until the opinion of the Treasury could be obtained in regard to the scheme.

11. Lord French stated that, in his view, any relaxation of the Defence of the Realm Act at this moment would make it impossible to govern Ireland. Similarly, any reduction of the military garrison of Ireland would be fatal. Although Ireland was superficially quiet, it was seething with discontent and rebellious intentions underneath. There had been several cases where this rebellious feeling had broken out. He instanced the forcible seizure of explosives in Dublin in
August, and the more recent attack upon Cork Prison by a gang of men who had overpowered the warders and succeeded in liberating a prisoner awaiting trial on the charge of shooting a policeman. On the whole, there was greater public confidence throughout Ireland, owing to the strong attitude taken by the Government, and people were not so frightened of the terrorist activities of the extreme section as they had been some months ago. The police were being fully supported by the Administration and by the military, with the result that the confidence of the police, which had been undermined, was now restored. On the whole, the machine was working well, but it was only the presence of a big force in Ireland and the support given by the Administration to the police that kept the country quiet. Although he was convinced that the present system of government would have to be changed, and some form of Home Rule set up, he was confident that Home Rule in any form was impossible at this moment.

Mr. Long stated that, owing to the policy of alternate strength and weakness which had been shown by successive Irish Administrations in the past, the public had been forced to keep one eye on the Government and one eye upon the rebels, in case the turn of the latter should come. We were at the present moment passing through a most critical phase in the history of Ireland. We were face to face with an organised movement to overthrow the Government of Ireland and to reassert the authority of a terrorist Sinn Fein minority. However, owing to the work of Lord French and Mr. Shortt, and more particularly owing to their support of the police, the authority of the law was being maintained. He hoped that this policy would continue and would receive the support of the Government.

Lord French and Mr. Shortt both agreed with this view. Mr. Herbert Fisher asked how large the physical force party was. Lord French and Mr. Shortt both agreed that it was small. Mr. Chamberlain pointed out that if strong government was in any way relaxed, it would not be the majority of the Irish people who would rule, but the small physical-force party. Mr. Shortt stated that, in the coming election, he thought about sixty Sinn Fein members would be returned at the polls, and the Nationalist Party reduced to twenty. No doubt, as soon as the elections were over, the Sinn Feiners elected would ask to be released in order to come to Westminster, although they had no intention of coming to Westminster, and the present idea was to set up in Ireland a Provisional Government on the lines of the Ulster Provisional Government, which had been drawn up by Sir Edward Carson in 1914.

Mr. Herbert Fisher asked whether there was any possibility of dividing the Sinn Fein forces. Mr. Shortt replied that, although there were certain indications that such a division was possible, it was extremely unlikely at the present juncture.

Lord French pointed out in this connection that, whereas the Transport Workers' Union had proposed to separate from Sinn Fein, they were now again working together and had come to an arrangement with regard to the elections.

Mr. Long stated that most of the moderate men were leaving the Nationalist Party and were not seeking re-election, while even among those who were left there seemed to be a great many divisions. Mr. Shortt agreed with this view, and added that from the very first Mr. Devlin had not been loyal to Mr. Dillon. The separation of some of the best men who had hitherto formed part of the Nationalist Party at Westminster might lead to the formation of a Central Party in Ireland who would co-operate with the Irish Government to get practical things done.

Mr. Long stated that he thought the suggestion which Lord French had in mind, of setting up an Advisory Council with
statutory authority to assist the Irish Government, would be most
helpful, as the Government in Ireland had always been isolated from
contact with the Irish people, and it had been difficult for the
members of the Irish Government even to meet representative
Irishmen.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer stated that he had recently
spoken to Mr. Dillon and Mr. T. P. O'Connor, who had agreed that
for the present nothing could be done in regard to Ireland other
than to enforce the law.

12. The War Cabinet had before then the Report (Paper G.-225)
of Lord Cave’s Committee appointed by War Cabinet 412, Minute 3,
on the 15th May, 1918, in regard to the provision of land for soldiers
on demobilisation.

Dr. Addison read to the Cabinet the main provisions recommended
by the Committee, and urged the approval of the Report of the
Committee.

Mr. Prothero stated that, while he was in agreement with the
decisions of the Committee, he thought that the proposals were
quite inadequate for dealing with the critical situation which had
now arisen owing to the signing of the armistice and the coming
General Election. He thought that the proposals of the Committee
would not enable the Government to get land quickly enough or in
sufficient quantities. He hoped that the Government would face the
question in real earnest, and would be prepared to lay out a sum of
anything from 20,000,000l. to 30,000,000l. in the first year for the
acquisition and equipment of land through the County Councils.
The State would have to undertake to pay, at the end of each
financial year, the difference between receipts and expenditure. The
guarantee of a large sum now was the only thing which could save
what had now amounted to an emergency situation. He had been
endeavouring to see the Prime Minister in regard to this question,
and had taken this, which was the first opportunity to raise this
new proposal.

Mr. Long said that he agreed with Mr. Prothero that the whole
of this question would be raised at the Election in a difficult form,
and that the problem must be faced immediately. With regard to
the proposed utilisation of County Councils, he feared that while, on
the whole, the County Councils had done excellent public work,
there was suspicion of them in many quarters, and he urged that
in every county composite bodies, containing nominated members as
well as County Councillors, should be appointed to carry through
some such scheme as had been suggested by Mr. Prothero. It was
also desirable that any money granted for equipment should be
available as much for land provided voluntarily as for land acquired
by County Councils.

Mr. Shortt asked whether Ireland was excluded from the pro-
visions outlined in the Report of Lord Cave’s Committee, as he would
very much like several of the proposals, such as those in connection
with reclamation, afforestation, and the provision of agricultural
credit, extended to Ireland.

Dr. Addison replied that, for the present, it had not been pro-
posed to extend the provisions to Ireland.

The War Cabinet approved the proposals of Lord Cave’s
Committee (Paper G.-225) and of Mr. Long’s suggestion with regard
to grants for equipment, and requested—

Lord Cave’s Committee to meet at the earliest possible date,
and, if possible, daily, to consider and report upon the
proposal made that day to the Cabinet by Mr. Prothero,
with a view to their arriving at an early decision in the
matter.
The War Cabinet further decided—
To add Sir Auckland Geddes to the Committee.

13. The War Cabinet took note of the Prime Minister's decision—
To appoint Mr. Herbert Fisher to be Acting Chairman of the Committee on Home Affairs, and to appoint Sir Auckland Geddes to be a member of the Committee in the place of Lord Downham.

2, Whitehall Gardens, S.W.,
21st November, 1918.