SECRET.

WAR CABINET, 523.

Minutes of a Meeting of the War Cabinet, held at 10, Downing Street, S.W., on Friday, January 31, 1919, at 3 P.M.

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


The following were also present:
The Right Hon. the Viscount Milner, G.C.B., G.C.M.G., Secretary of State for the Colonies.
The Right Hon. W. S. Churchill, M.P., Secretary of State for War (for Minutes 1-6).
Major-General C. F. Romer, C.B., C.M.G., War Office (for Minutes 1-6).
Major-General B. F. W. Childs, C.M.G., Director of Personal Services (for Minutes 1-6).
The Right Hon. C. Addison, M.D., M.P., President, Local Government Board (for Minutes 3-8).
Sir H. C. Monro, K.C.B., Permanent Secretary, Local Government Board (for Minutes 7, 8).
The Right Hon. the Earl of Reading, G.C.B., K.C.V.O., K.C.
The Right Hon. W. Long, M.P., First Lord of the Admiralty (for Minutes 1-6).
The Right Hon. E. S. Shortt, K.C., M.P., Secretary of State for Home Affairs (for Minutes 1-8).
The Right Hon. Sir A. Stanley, M.P., President, Board of Trade (for Minutes 4-6).
The Right Hon. Sir R. S. Horne, K.B.E., K.C., Minister of Labour (for Minutes 1-6).
Sir D. J. Shackleton, K.C.B., Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Labour (for Minutes 1-6).
The Right Hon. R. Munro, K.C., M.P., Secretary for Scotland (for Minutes 1-8).
The Right Hon. J. L. Macpherson, M.P., Chief Secretary for Ireland (for Minutes 1-8).

Mr. Thomas Jones, Acting Secretary.
Mr. G. M. Evans, Assistant Secretary.
Lieutenant-Colonel L. Stoke, C.B., Assistant Secretary.
Captain L. F. Burgess, Assistant Secretary.
Industrial Unrest.

Strike Situation in Glasgow and Belfast.

1. With reference to War Cabinet 522, Minute 1, the Chief Secretary for Ireland said that as regards the situation in Belfast he had received a telegram from Lord French saying that the situation was satisfactory as far as it could be. The workmen had formed a "Soviet" Committee, and this committee had received forty-seven applications from small traders for permission to use light. There were, however, signs which indicated that the strike would not be of long duration.

With regard to the situation in Glasgow the Minister of Labour said that his latest information was to the effect that a crowd had met in front of the Municipal Buildings in order to receive the Government's reply to the Lord Provost's telegram. He had no details, but understood that foot and mounted police had charged the crowd in order to quell a riot and casualties had resulted.

The Secretary for Scotland said that, in his opinion, it was more clear than ever that it was a misnomer to call the situation in Glasgow a strike—it was a Bolshevist rising. It was, he thought, of limited dimensions in numbers if not in effect. He would put the malcontents at 10,000, and this was an outside figure. There was no doubt that public opinion would support the Government in quelling any disorder. Further, there was a feeling of resentment on the part of many who wished to return to work that they were prevented from doing so. The crisis would probably be reached to-day. The Secretary for Scotland added that he had received information from the office of the Commissioner of the Police to the effect that the strike gave the appearance of breaking up at an early date, and that there was a strong feeling against the leaders.

General Bonier stated that the necessary orders had been given to the G.O.C., Scotland, with regard to the movement of troops. An officer had been sent to the headquarters of the Scottish Command last night to explain the situation. The number of troops which could be put into Glasgow at short notice was about 12,000.

The Deputy Chief of the Imperial General Staff said that 6 tanks and 100 motor lorries with drivers were going north by rail that night.

The Lord Advocate, with regard to the possibility of arresting and making examples of some of the leaders in the strike, said that there were three possible lines of action—first, Defence of the Realm Regulation No. 14, under which the leaders could be deported if the Army Council gave the necessary instructions to a competent military authority.

Mr. Churchill said that the authority could be given in a very few minutes, if necessary.

The Lord Advocate, proceeding, said the second course was to proceed under Defence of the Realm Regulation No. 42, and arrest a person with a view to prosecution for causing disaffection among the civil population. This might be used in the present case if sufficient evidence was available. The third course was to proceed under Defence of the Realm Regulation No. 55, by which any police constable was empowered to make an arrest if he had the suspicion that a past act had been committed or a future act was contemplated against the law. There were, however, difficulties in the way of this course, inasmuch as mistakes might be made which would place both himself and the Government in an uncomfortable position. In his view deportation was practically the only means of procedure if instant action were required.

The First Lord said that he had received satisfactory news from Scotland through the Naval Intelligence Department. This was to the effect that, even if the men were prepared to stand out, the women would not let them. Many men wanted to return to work, but were prevented from doing so owing to the stoppage of electric power. The Naval Intelligence Department also understood that
the agitation was badly organised, and there was widespread ill-feeling against the strikers' leaders.

The War Cabinet decided—
That for the moment no further action was necessary by the Government.

2. The Secretary of State for War stated that the trouble at Calais had been mastered. Two divisions had been moved to the area and order had been restored. The three ringleaders would be tried by court-martial to-morrow. The trouble had arisen over the railwaymen and the Ordnance Corps refusing to work. These men had also managed to involve the troops, who were on board ship waiting to proceed to England. He added that it would greatly ease dissatisfaction of this sort in France if we could obtain the use of the Rhine and the Scheldt for the transport of armed troops to Cologne. Negotiations to this end were already taking place through the usual diplomatic channels. He feared it would take some time before the necessary permission could be obtained. In the meantime, however, the War Office was making the necessary preparations, and the Acting Secretary for Foreign Affairs on the 23rd January had approved of this course. It was important to bring all possible diplomatic pressure on the Dutch Government with a view to securing the facilities asked for.

The War Cabinet decided—
That the Acting Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs should telegraph to Paris informing Mr. Balfour of the preparations which the Secretary of State for War was making, and adding that unless Mr. Balfour advised to the contrary, it was proposed to inform the Dutch Government that we would make use of the Scheldt and Rhine.

3. The Minister of Labour said that Sir Albert Stanley and himself had met the representatives of the coal-miners that morning with regard to their demand for a six hours' day. The deputation also demanded exceptionally favourable demobilisation terms, viz., that miners returning from the forces should receive full wages until they obtained employment, and also that the men turned out of the mines to make way for the returning miners from the forces should receive similar treatment until they found work. In addition they asked for an advance of 30 per cent. on their wages and the nationalisation of the mines. The delegates had said that unless a reply on the wages issue was received by Monday trouble would ensue. It was pointed out to them, however, that the whole wage question was closely connected with that of a six-hour day, and the position would be considered by the Government as rapidly as possible, and a reply would be given if possible by the end of next week.

4. Sir Albert Stanley entered at this stage and stated that within the last few minutes the London railwaymen had threatened to go on strike on the following day. The question in dispute was whether the eight-hour day should be inclusive or exclusive of meal-time. The general settlement arrived at a few weeks ago provided for the acceptance of the principle of an eight-hour working-day (to come into operation on the 1st February), and it was also agreed that the men's conditions of service should remain unchanged pending negotiations.
He then explained the varying conditions as to meal-times on
the different railways. The men on the engines worked what they
called “an all-over time” of ten, eleven, or twelve hours,
which meant the work was continuous and the meals were taken
on the engines whenever opportunity offered. This applied also to
certain signalmen and shunters. It had been agreed that under the
eight-hour day the same practice with regard to meals would be
continued. Other grades on the railway, however, had a definite
time “booked off” for meals. The men now said that unless their
demands for inclusion of meal-time in the eight hours were conceded
they would only work eight hours (meal-time inclusive) and then
cease work. He had told the Railway Executive to dismiss any men
who carried out this threat. Messrs. Bromley and Hudson, the
representatives of the men’s Unions, had agreed that the Govern­
ment’s interpretation of the eight-hour day was in conformity with
the agreement, i.e., that it should be eight hours’ work, exclusive of
meals. The railwaymen were however, in some measure out of hand,
and although they had been instructed by their leaders to observe
this interpretation of the agreement it could not be guaranteed that
they would do so. On the whole it was hoped that, except in
London, to which he would presently refer, no serious difficulty would
be experienced in the case of the larger railway companies.

5. Sir Albert Stanley stated that the drivers on the London
Tubes had previously had somewhat better conditions of service than
the others. They had had a nine-hours’ day and were allowed to
take thirty to fifty minutes off for meals, and these meals were not
taken on the train. These men now asked that with the eight­
hours’ day the same conditions should apply. In Sir Albert Stanley’s
opinion this demand struck at the very principle of the eight-hours’
working day, and if their point was conceded it would
become
a
source of further general concessions. The men threatened to stop
all the underground trains that night.

The Secretary of State for War said that nothing would put
public opinion more against the strikers than a two or three days’
stoppage on the tubes. In his opinion this was a most unjustifiable
demand.

The First Lord said that a number of engine-drivers on the
main lines would prefer to work ten or twelve hours consecutively,
as this enabled them to make a double journey and thus they were
able to sleep at their own homes; whereas if they left their engines
after eight hours, it generally necessitated their finding a lodging in
some town away from home. On the other hand, the engine-drivers
on the tube railways were able to sleep at home every night.

Some discussion ensued as to whether, by insisting that the
meal-times of these men should not be included in the eight-hours’
day, the Government were not, in fact, breaking their promise that
the conditions of service should continue unchanged.

In reply to a question as to whether the Union leaders were
supporting the Government in their interpretation of the agreement
in this particular instance, Sir Albert Stanley said he could not be
sure.

6. Sir Albert Stanley said there was another matter with regard
to the railway situation, to which he desired to draw the War
Cabinet’s attention. There was a dispute with the Railway Clerks’
Association. This Union included a large percentage of grades,
from station-masters down to low-grade clerks in booking-offices.
This Union was asking that the Railway Companies should give com­
plete recognition to it. The Railway Executive were unanimously
against conceding this demand. The Railway Executive would not
object to recognising a Union consisting only of station-masters and
other supervisory grades, but they maintained that the Railway Clerks' Association, in including station-masters and similar grades as well as ordinary clerks, undermined the discipline of the railway. There would be men occupying high positions on the railway who would belong to the same Union as the men to whom they had to give orders. In fact, the employers would be in the same Union as the employees—an impossible situation.

He supported the Railway Executive in the position they had taken up. He had made a suggestion, however, that the Railway Clerks' Association should meet the Railway Executive and try to arrive at an agreement as to which grades should and should not be allowed to join their Union. They had, however, refused this, and were calling a national conference.

Sir Eric Geddes said that this was a very important principle. The National Union of Railwaymen had never claimed to speak for any of their members who were foremen. These men, and all who had been promoted from non-supervisory grades, were allowed to remain in the Union, but only for the purpose of receiving benefits. The Railway Clerks' Association had started years ago with the very lowest grade of clerk, but the members found that as promotion came along the Railway Executive, before promoting them made it a condition that they should resign from their Union. If these supervisory grades were now recognised in the Railway Clerks' Association it would result in the Trade Union running the railway. He thought the conference which Sir Albert Stanley had suggested in order to determine which grades should remain in the Union was bound to fail.

In answer to a question by Mr. Bonar Law as to why the same principle which obtained in the National Union of Railwaymen, i.e., that the men should remain members of a Union but not take an active part, could not be applied in this case, Sir Eric Geddes replied that the numbers of the higher grades were much bigger.

It was pointed out that in other industries foremen and men in one workshop belonged to the same Union, and this had no deleterious effect on discipline.

Sir Eric Geddes said that the discipline on the railways and in workshops was necessarily very different. In the former it had to be of a very high order, and it would be impossible for station-masters to get their orders observed if the men under them belonged to the same Union.

Sir David Shackleton said that if this question was fought out, and it resulted in the railway clerks having to form two or more Unions, all that would happen would be that these Unions would federate, and in that way defeat the Government. In his opinion the Government could not face a strike on the cry that it refused to acknowledge a Union.

Mr. Bonar Law thought that this strike looked less dangerous than some of the others, but he would not like to face it if it were based on a refusal to recognise a Union. He suggested that Sir Albert Stanley might protract the negotiations, and in the meantime discuss the matter with the Minister of Labour.

Sir Albert Stanley thought that only compromise would result from such a course, and in this case he saw no possibility of compromise. The answer had to be given immediately. The question had been under consideration for several years. He asked if the Government was going to recognise this Union in face of the advice given by the Railway Executive.

Attention was drawn to the fact that the Government had asked the managers to enter into negotiations with the men, and that being so the Government could hardly disregard the policy recommended by the Railway Executive. It was important that the Glasgow trouble should subside before entering upon a new conflict with labour.

Sir Albert Stanley said that if we delayed action it would lend [826]—114
encouragement to the men, inasmuch that they would think the Government would give way. It was not a question of concessions any longer. He thought that if this came to a strike the men would be beaten, as the other railway Unions would not come out in sympathy.

Sir Eric Geddes also thought that a strike could be faced on the present issue.

It was suggested that a big general strike was probably coming sooner or later, and if and when it came the strike would be on ground chosen by the Government.

Sir Albert Stanley replied that he did not think this present strike would develop into the big conflict which was apprehended.

Some discussion then took place as to the number of station-masters who now belonged to the Railway Clerks' Association, but no information was available as to the exact number.

Lord Reading said that if the numbers were great, then the point made regarding the necessity for station-masters to remain outside the Union in order to maintain discipline would seem to be somewhat weakened.

Sir R. Home said the Government's policy was to stand by the Trade Unions and support their executive authority. It was important not to object to the Union as such, but to including particular classes of persons in it.

Sir David Shackleton said that he had worked both in the position of a workman and a foreman, and his experience was that both grades belonging to the same Union never affected discipline, but if the Government refused to recognise this Union, it was in opposition to their avowed policy, and the Government should not try to decide who was and who was not to be in the Union. In his opinion they should trust to the honour and loyalty of the men.

Dr. Addison said that he agreed with the view of Sir David Shackleton. If a considerable portion of the station-masters were now in the Union and it had not affected the efficient working of the railways, he could not see that the Government had a case.

Sir Albert Stanley pointed out that the Railway Clerks' Association had been recognised for the last year or two. The dispute now was whether it should be recognised in respect of the supervisory grades who claimed to belong to it.

The War Cabinet decided—

That the Government could not at the present moment interfere with the negotiations which were now going on, but that, if possible, Sir Albert Stanley should prolong the negotiations until the Prime Minister had been acquainted with the position.

7. The War Cabinet had before them a memorandum by the President of the Local Government Board (G.T.-6718) in respect of candidates' expenses at municipal and other local elections, to which was attached the draft of a Bill to amend section 5 of the Municipal Elections (Corrupt and Illegal Practices) Act, 1884, by substituting the words "3d. for each elector" for the words "2d. for each elector," in the subsection prescribing the maximum amount of the expenses of a candidate at municipal elections.

The President of the Local Government Board said that the reasons for asking consent of the Government to the introduction of the said Bill were briefly explained in his memorandum now before the War Cabinet. The amendment had been urged upon him by the London County Council and the County Councils Association, and it appeared to him a reasonable proposal, which, in his opinion, would not meet with any opposition. He therefore asked for permission to
bring in the accompanying Bill with a view to its being passed at the earliest possible moment.

The War Cabinet decided—

To sanction the introduction of the proposed Bill.

8. The War Cabinet had before them a Memorandum by the President of the Local Government Board (Paper G.T.-6726) on the subject of local elections in the year 1919. In his Memorandum Dr. Addison pointed out that local elections in the United Kingdom would be held in 1919 for the first time in four years. In the case of the Municipal Boroughs and the majority of District Councils and Guardians one-third of the Councillors and Guardians retire each year. In addition, the Aldermen, who are co-opted by County or Borough Councils, are elected for six years, one-half of them retiring every third year. It appeared desirable, therefore, that there should be a complete new election in 1919, on the grounds particularly of protracted tenure of office and the presence of a new electorate. A draft Bill (which was annexed to the Memorandum) had been prepared on these lines, although it was confined to the case of Councillors and omitted any reference to Aldermen, owing to the anticipated opposition of the Boroughs, and the fact that it was not possible to get the Bill passed in time to affect the County Council Aldermen.

Mr. Bonar Law observed that he thought that the opinions of the local authorities should mainly determine the decision of the Government on the matter. It was a question which he thought could be referred to the Home Affairs Committee.

The War Cabinet decided—

To refer this Bill to the Home Affairs Committee as soon as the Prime Minister had approved setting it up again.

9. With reference to War Cabinet 514, Minute 3, the War Cabinet took note of the Prime Minister's appointment of Sir Auckland Geddes, as Minister in charge of the Co-ordination of Demobilisation and the Rehabilitation of Industry, vice Sir Eric Geddes.

2, Whitehall Gardens, S.W. 1,
January 31, 1919.