MINUTES OF A MEETING HELD AT 10, DOWNING STREET, S.W., ON THURSDAY, MARCH 6, 1919, 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.

The following were also present:


The Right Hon. E. Shortt, K.C., M.P., Secretary of State for Home Affairs (for Minute 1).


The Right Hon. Sir J. Maclay, Bart., Shipping Controller (for Minutes 2 and 3).

The Right Hon. Sir L. Worthington Evans, Bart., M.P., Minister of Pensions (for Minute 4).

The Right Hon. Lord Inverforth, Minister of Munitions (for Minute 1).


The Right Hon. W. S. Churchill, M.P., Secretary of State for War.

Major-General P. P. de B. Radcliffe, C.B., D.S.O., Director of Military Operations (for Minutes 1-3).

Sir T. W. Holderness, G.C.B., K.C.S.I., Permanent Under-Secretary, India Office (for Minute 1).

Colonel L. S. Amery, M.P., Parliamentary Secretary, Colonial Office (for Minute 1).

Major the Hon. W. Astor, M.P., Parliamentary Secretary, Local Government Board (for Minute 4).

Mr. W. T. Layton, C.B.E., Ministry of Munitions (for Minute 1).

Mr. Thomas Jones, Acting Secretary.

Mr. G. M. Evans, Assistant Secretary.

Lieutenant-Colonel L. Storr, C.B., Assistant Secretary.

Mr. Pembroke Wicks, Assistant Secretary.
Arms Traffic.

1. The War Cabinet had before them the Report of a Sub-Committee of the Committee of Imperial Defence on Arms Traffic (Paper P.-13); a Memorandum by the Foreign Office (Paper G.T.-6875), to which was attached a Draft Convention for the control of arms traffic; and the Report of an Inter-Departmental Conference, held at the India Office on the 24th February, 1919 (P.-108), which had met to consider a telegram from the British Delegation in Paris (No. 327) to the War Cabinet, requesting an early decision of the Cabinet on the subject, as negotiations with the French to secure their adhesion to the draft of the Arms Convention were about to open.

Sir Thomas Holderness stated that he had been the Chairman of the Inter-Departmental Conference, and briefly explained the recommendations made in the Conference’s Report. The Conference had to consider whether the policy embodied in the Report of the Arms Committee was to prevail, or whether realisation of British surplus stocks was to continue. If disposal was to be allowed at all, it was desirable to determine what safeguards would have to be insisted upon. The Conference found that the only existing contract at present with the Ministry of Munitions was one to supply guns, &c, to the United States Government to the value of 7,000,000L, but negotiations were proceeding for the supply of arms, &c, from surplus stocks to various neutral Governments. In the Foreign Office memorandum a suggestion had been made that the Conference over which he had presided should, in default of any other solution, draw up two lists, (a) of countries to which war material might be sold regardless of its nature, (b) of war material which might safely be sold regardless of the country of destination. In respect of these suggestions the Conference had been faced with the difficulty that certain countries could not be trusted not to re-sell arms purchased by them to uncivilised races. A further proposal had been made, to the effect that guns, and gun ammunition, and possibly bombs, and machine guns should be left out of the Convention, and that in regard to these the League of Nations might impose a universal rationing system.

Mr. Bonar Law said that he thought that the United States would never agree to the unrestricted sale of guns and ammunition, especially to Latin America. The best way, in his view, would be simply to confine the Convention to small arms, to which there should be no difficulty in obtaining the concurrence of the United States.

The Minister of Munitions, in reply to a question, said that his Department naturally was very anxious to see the surplus stocks sold. Lord Curzon said that the problem originally arose out of the arms traffic in the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf. The situation was now complicated by the enormous amount of material that existed. In the old days we had received no assistance from France in stopping the traffic, but both France and the United States were now so frightened about the consequences of great quantities of arms getting into the wrong hands that they were willing to make common cause with us.

The War Cabinet decided:

(a.) That the terms of the Draft Convention should be so amended as to refer to and include small arms and small arms ammunition only;
(b.) That, consequently, article 3 should stand, and that the proposed amendment of the Inter-Departmental Conference of this article need not be accepted;
(c.) That article 4 of the Convention should be amended by omitting everything following the words “all destinations” in line 2;
(d.) To add at the end of article 5 the words, “which will satisfy itself in each case that the arms and ammunition are required for a legitimate purpose.”
(e.) To delete in Article 25 the words “and raw materials for explosives.”
And directed—

The Acting Secretary to reply to telegram No. 327 from the Secretary to the British Delegation in the above sense.

2. The War Cabinet had under consideration a Memorandum by the Shipping Controller (Paper G.T.-6922) with reference to the shipping which would be required to transport munitions of war to the Black Sea for the assistance of General Denekin, in which it was stated that additional tonnage to the extent of 150 per cent. of that hitherto indicated would be required, involving the use of some twenty or more ships of 5,000 tons, that, owing to the shortage of tonnage, the Shipping Controller considered the demand as very serious, and that, if the work were to be undertaken, Italy and France should be called upon to give at least equal assistance, as an Allied responsibility.

The Secretary of State for War said that the shipping he asked for would not all be required at once, but he wished to avoid successive delays in obtaining ships from time to time as they were required. An Inter-Departmental Committee, which had just met under Lord Curzon's Chairmanship, had decided to recommend to the War Cabinet a threefold policy in the Caucasus—

(i.) To make preparations to withdraw;
(ii.) To compensate General Denekin for our withdrawal by supplying him with material and munitions of war, and with a military mission as proposed;
(iii.) To make it a condition of such support that General Denekin should not interfere with the Georgians and other independent States in the Caucasus.

He regarded the supply of arms to General Denekin as a lever, on the one hand, to enable him to fight the Bolsheviks, and, on the other, to prevent him from maltreating the Southern States; and the supply of this material was therefore an essential part of the scheme for removing our troops as quickly as possible. He proposed to spread the supply over the next few months, doling it out to General Denekin according to his requirements. It was necessary to retain the power to control him if he did not fall in with our wishes. Mr. Churchill hoped that the Shipping Controller would be willing to supply the shipping within the next few months, in order that the War Office might carry out a coherent policy with regard to the Caucasus. It was useless to invite either the French or the Americans to provide the shipping, as General Denekin came solely within the British sphere, though he agreed that the fact that we were supplying the shipping for the Caucasus was a point which should be raised in regard to other claims by the Allies for shipping assistance from this country; for example, the transport of General Haller's army to Poland. Moreover, the demand for twenty shipments of 5,000 tons did not involve the employment of twenty ships for more than a single voyage. The transport of this material would be spread over some months, and it was quite possible that only a quarter of that number of ships would be required, each ship making several journeys. The evacuation of the British troops could not take place for some months, owing to the necessity of withdrawing troops from distant points, such as Trans-Caspia and Krasnovodsk, and moving them along the Baku railway to Batum. Mr. Churchill pointed out that the scheme advocated was the only practicable one to carry out the policy of evacuation consistently with our obligations to the Southern peoples, and the necessity for covering the withdrawal of our own troops. It was essential to support General Denekin, for if he were to break down our troops would be cut off by the Bolsheviks. General Denekin was a great shield to our troops along the whole of the line.

Lord Curzon concurred in Mr. Churchill's observations with
regard to the evacuation of troops, and pointed out that it could not
be carried out hurriedly, but must be progressive, and might be
attended by disorder and bloodshed, owing to fighting between
the local populations in consequence of our withdrawal. We were
relying on General Denekin to fight and beat the Bolsheviks.
He had shown a tendency, however, to turn southward and
attack the States on the other side of the Caucasus as an easier
target. He was a type of the old-fashioned monarchical Russian
who regarded it as his natural role to bring back the Caucasus
States under Russian rule. Lord Curzon said that he was
entirely in agreement with the Secretary of State for War that
it was necessary to retain control over General Denekin through
the supply of material, which should be used to carry out his real
object of attacking in the north, but not in the south.

The Shipping Controller stated that the shipping position was
becoming more serious every day. New proposals were continually
being put up. Already eighteen ships were asked for to transport
material to the Black Sea, and it was now proposed to increase this
number by 150 per cent. He protested that the British Government
should not be required to furnish all the ships needed for transport.
Ships which had recently been taken from the Austrians by the
Italians, and were intended to be under the control of the Allies, were
being used by the Italians for a great Libyan expedition. There
were heavy demands for tonnage for bringing wheat from Australia,
and ships would shortly be required to supplement the wheat supply
of India. In addition, there were over 400 ships round the coast
requiring repairs, which it had not been possible to execute owing to
the shipbuilding strike; while, owing to the possibility of coal trouble,
it had been necessary to divert tonnage to build up stocks of coal in
our coaling stations. It was quite impossible for him to carry out
properly shipping programmes if constant new demands were sprung
upon him suddenly by the War Office.

The Secretary of State for War protested that it was becoming
increasingly difficult to carry out any coherent policy, owing to
objections raised by the Shipping Controller and the Treasury. The
War Office had tried very hard to devise a scheme within the limits
laid down by the Cabinet. Moreover, with the withdrawal of our
forces in the Caucasus, an enormous drain upon shipbuilding would
be removed. All he asked at present was that the Cabinet should
approve the continued despatch of these stores, and to leave it to
him to arrange with the Shipping Controller, so far as possible, to
make the necessary provision.

Lord Curzon observed that the assistance for General Denekin
would go on for some months. It must be spread over a prolonged
period, and he did not think the strain on the Ministry of Shipping
would be as great at the present moment as Sir Joseph Maclay
feared.

Mr. Bonar Law suggested that the Secretary of State for War
should arrange for somebody in the War Office to have the
function of investigating the War Office shipping requirements,
and of discussing them some time in advance with the Shipping
Controller.

Mr. Churchill said that Sir Sam Fay was already doing that.

Sir Joseph Maclay said that he assumed it was understood
that we should endeavour to get Allied ships for the purpose, should
it be possible.

The War Cabinet decided that—

The Shipping Controller should confer with the Secretary of
State for War, and should endeavour to do everything possible
to provide the shipping necessary to carry out the
War Cabinet’s decision as to the transport of the material
to the Black Sea for the support of General Denekin, on
the understanding that the provision of supplies would be
spread over a period of several months.
Use of Warships
for the Conveyance
of Troops.

3. With reference to War Cabinet 537, Minute 7, the War Cabinet further considered a suggestion made by the Shipping Controller that warships should be used for the transport of troops, as was being done by the American Government.

The First Lord of the Admiralty stated that he had gone very carefully into the matter with his Naval Advisers, and had come to the conclusion that it was impossible to use warships for the purpose, owing to the limited accommodation on board. He had no knowledge of how the Americans contrived to do it, but after very careful enquiry he was convinced that it was not a practicable proposal.

The Shipping Controller said that he found it very difficult to believe that it was not possible to make use of warships for the purpose.

The War Cabinet decided that—

The First Lord of the Admiralty should summon a meeting of his Naval Advisers, which representatives of the Ministry of Shipping should be invited to attend, in order that the matter might be further explored, having regard in particular to the use being made by the American Government of their warships for the transport of troops.

Ministry of Health.

4. The War Cabinet had under consideration a memorandum by the President of the Local Government Board (Paper G.T.-6860), in which the War Cabinet were asked to agree to a definite ruling—

(a.) That no Department of State should create a new medical branch within its own province;

(b.) That no Department of State should expand an already existing medical branch or make new medical appointments, or establish a revised scale of medical salaries, without the concurrence of the President of the Local Government Board.

After some discussion between the Minister of Pensions and the Parliamentary Secretary of the Local Government Board, Mr. Bonar Law suggested that the proposals in Dr. Addison's memorandum went further than the case required, and that it would be sufficient if the Minister of Health were consulted before higher medical appointments were made in any branch of a Department which was liable to be transferred to the Ministry of Health. If, on the one hand, this arrangement were found burdensome by the Department concerned, or if, on the other, the Minister of Health found that appointments were being made to the prejudice of the administration of the branch when it was transferred to him, the matter could be brought before the Cabinet.

The War Cabinet decided that—

An instruction should be issued to all Departments, which were liable to be transferred to the Ministry of Health, that important appointments of medical officers should only be made after consultation with the Minister of Health.

Supreme Economic Council.

5. With reference to War Cabinet 535, Minute 6, and Paper I.C.-136, Minute 5, the War Cabinet took note of, and approved, the following decision of the British Empire Delegation (Paper B.E.D.-10, Minute 1) on the subject of the Supreme Economic Council:

(a.) That the Supreme Economic Council should be constituted, as regards the British Empire, on the panel system, with five representatives for Great Britain, the Dominions,
and India. Lord Robert Cecil would be the principal British Delegate on the Council.

(b.) That, instead of having two Committees, one British and one Dominions and India, to advise the British representatives on the Supreme Economic Council, as had been agreed by the War Cabinet on the 24th February, there should be one British Empire Economic Committee, with Lord Robert Cecil as Chairman;

(c.) That Mr. J. A. Salter should be Secretary of the Economic Committee, and that he should be assisted by members of the staffs of the Dominion and Indian Delegations on the panel system, as in the case of the Secretariat of the British Empire Delegation.

---

6. With reference to War Cabinet 514, Minute 1, the War Cabinet approved the following decision of the Soldiers' and Sailors' Pay Committee on the subject of gratuities for temporary officers of the Royal Navy (Paper G.T.-6907):

That the gratuity to temporary naval officers should be on the same scale as that granted to temporary officers of the Army under article 497 of the Royal Warrant, viz.: 124 days' pay for the first year of service, and 62 days' pay for each succeeding year or part of a year of service.

2, Whitehall Gardens, S.W. 1,
March 6, 1919.