

# PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES.

## HOUSE OF LORDS.

TUESDAY, 19TH FEBRUARY, 1918.

Vol. **29.**—No. **2.**

### OFFICIAL REPORT.

[UNREVISED]



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## HOUSE OF LORDS.

Tuesday, 19th February, 1918.

H.R.H. THE PRINCE OF WALES  
INTRODUCED.

His Royal Highness Edward, The Prince of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland (Duke of Cornwall and Rothesay, Earl of Carrick, Baron of Renfrew, Lord of the Isles, and Great Steward of Scotland), having been created Prince of Wales and Earl of Chester was, in his Robes, and wearing the Collar of the Order of the Garter, introduced in the following order—

DEPUTY GENTLEMAN USHER OF THE BLACK ROD,  
Captain T. D. Butler.

GARTER PRINCIPAL KING OF ARMS,  
Sir Alfred Scott-Gatty (carrying the Patent).

The Lord Balfour of Burleigh.

The Marquess of Crewe.

THE DEPUTY EARL MARSHAL,  
Lieutenant-Colonel Lord Edmund B. Talbot

THE LORD GREAT CHAMBERLAIN,

The Marquess of Lincolnshire.

THE LORD PRIVY SEAL,

The Earl of Crawford.

THE LORD PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL,

The Earl Curzon of Kedleston.

THE CORONET OF THE PRINCE,

On a Crimson Velvet Cushion, borne by

The Honourable Sir Sidney Greville.

The Duke of Beaufort.

HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS THE PRINCE OF  
WALES

(carrying his Writ of Summons).

The Duke of Somerset.

ATTENDING UPON HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS,

Lord Claude Nigel Hamilton.

His Royal Highness, standing, presented his Letters Patent to The Lord Chancellor at the Woolsack, who delivered them to the Clerk of the Parliaments; and the same were read at the Table.

Then His Royal Highness, at the Table, took and subscribed the Oath required to be taken by the Act of the 21st and 22nd Victoria, Cap. 48; after which His Royal Highness was conducted to his Chair on the Right Hand of the Throne.

## MESSAGE FROM THE KING.

His Majesty's Answer to the Address of Tuesday last reported by the Lord Steward (*V. Farquhar*) as follows—

“I have received with great satisfaction the loyal and dutiful expression of your thanks for the Speech with which I have opened the present session of Parliament.”

(D 1024)

## INCOME TAX BILL. [H.L.]

A Bill to consolidate the enactments relating to Income Tax—Was presented by the LORD CHANCELLOR, read 1<sup>a</sup>, to be printed, and to be read 2<sup>a</sup> on Tuesday next.

SOLICITORS (QUALIFICATION OF  
WOMEN) BILL. [H.L.]

A Bill to remove disqualifications on the ground of sex or marriage for admission of persons as Solicitors and their acting and practising as Solicitors under the Solicitors Acts—Was presented by LORD BUCKMASTER, read 1<sup>a</sup>, to be printed, and to be read 2<sup>a</sup> on Tuesday, March 5.

## THE INTER-ALLIED WAR COUNCIL.

THE MARQUESS OF CREWE: My Lords, I rise to ask His Majesty's Government a question, of which I have given private notice, arising out of the debate that took place here and in another place on Tuesday last, which, as your Lordships will remember, was concerned to a considerable extent with the composition and functions of the Council at Versailles and its relations to the Army Council and military concerns generally here. Since then, that debate has had the sequel of the change effected in the position of the Chief of the General Staff by his transfer to an appointment in this country, and I have no doubt that His Majesty's Government will be prepared to give your Lordships such information as can properly be given upon these various subjects.

It was noted in the debate of which I have spoken that a definite change was being carried into effect in the functions of the Supreme War Council at Versailles since the Prime Minister, on his return from his visit to Paris, described them in another place. That change was stated by the noble Earl the Lord President, in reply to a question of mine, to involve the assumption of certain executive functions, if functions connected with the disposition of troops could properly be so described; but in another place the information given was less defined. It appeared that the Prime Minister did not entirely separate in his own mind a request which was made for information on military administration from questions which certainly were never asked as to military plans, and in his reply he spoke of the decision come to at Versailles as involving a military decision of the first magnitude. On that the Prime Minister

was asked whether Sir Douglas Haig and Sir William Robertson had approved of the changes that were contemplated, to which he replied that all the representatives approved. Here, the noble Earl the Lord President replied to the same effect—I think in general terms—that he understood that the military representatives had not disapproved of the change.

Well, my Lords, those replies were evidently given under a misapprehension, because it soon became clear that one very important military representative—namely the Chief of the General Staff—did not approve of the contemplated changes. As to what were the views of the British Commander-in-Chief in France we have not seen any statement in the Press. It appeared that the objection taken by Sir William Robertson to the new arrangements was that he considered them unworkable, and, he holding that view, it was hardly possible that His Majesty's Government or my noble friend opposite, the Secretary of State for War, could have desired him to undertake the functions connected with these new arrangements either here or in France, and either in the first or the second place, as controlling this particular machine in which he did not believe. Then we understand that the special powers which, in view of the demands of the war, were given to the Chief of the General Staff under the Order in Council of January 27, 1916, have been withdrawn; and I have no doubt that we shall hear from His Majesty's Government whether the position has now been returned exactly to what it was when, in Lord Kitchener's time, that change was made. The effect, I understand, is to restore to the Secretary of State, as presiding over the Army Council, the power to give direct instructions to the Commanders-in-Chief of our Armies abroad—that is to say, that he is to act as the channel of communication, and not the Chief of the General Staff, who so acted under an arrangement which had been previously found to be the most convenient method.

Then the notice which was published—it was published yesterday, and we saw it in the morning papers—states that the Government thought it right to offer to Sir William Robertson the choice of becoming the Military Representative at Versailles or remaining C.I.G.S. under the new conditions. I should like to ask His Majesty's Government this question, whether that

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choice represents the original offer that was made, whether it represents in fact a single transaction, or whether the offer of the post at Paris was made independently and subsequently after Sir William Robertson had pointed out that in his opinion the position of the Chief of the General Staff at home was rendered impossible in view of the new relations between Whitehall and Versailles? I have no doubt that His Majesty's Government will find no difficulty in answering that question.

I further ask whether it is the fact that the relations between Sir Henry Wilson, the new Chief of the General Staff, and the Military Representative in Paris (whose name, I think, has not so far been announced) will be precisely the same as those which it was contemplated would exist between Sir William Robertson and Sir Henry Wilson, if Sir William had remained in London and Sir Henry had remained in Paris? I would also ask, Is the Military Representative at Versailles subordinate to the Chief of the General Staff in London—which, as the noble Earl will see, represents a quite intelligible position of the relations between the two, whatever the merits of such an arrangement might be—or are the two officers to be regarded in all respects as equal; or, in the third place, do they deal not with the same set of things but with different sets of things? Are the functions separate and distinct? If they do not deal with the same matters, what is the future relation of the C.I.G.S. to the Commanders-in-Chief—in particular, of course, the Commander-in-Chief in France? To whom will, in future, the Commander-in-Chief in France directly look for instructions given on behalf of the Government?

It is quite clear that in all these matters the last word must be with somebody. In one sense the last word is with His Majesty's Government, as we all agree it must be, but the last word but one must be with some military personage, and it is not clear, from anything that I have yet seen issued, with whom that responsibility will rest. From some of the accounts we have seen, describing the presumed functions of the Military Representative at Paris, it seems as though all that will be left to the Chief of the General Staff here is that he should be a sort of morocco-bound edition of the Adjutant-General, with his functions regarding discipline; the Quartermaster-General, with his functions regarding sup-

plies; and the General or Field-Marshal commanding the Home Forces; and that he would be abstracted from direct relations with the Armies in the field and have nothing whatever to do with the fighting arm.

This particular difficulty, which we all recognise to be a difficulty, clearly affects us in an entirely different way from that in which it affects the French Army. The arrangements in connection with the Versailles Council are not the same with regard to the French Army. General Foch is the principal French representative on the Supreme Council and is also the Chief of the Staff in direct relations with General Petain, the Commander-in-Chief in the field. It is therefore only so far as the Flanders front is concerned of the British Army that this difficulty applies, out of which so much has naturally been made owing, as I cannot help saying, to the singular delay in giving full explanations to Parliament which His Majesty's Government have apparently thought to be necessary. But those simple arrangements, which hold good in France, are forbidden to us by geography. It may be, of course, that a complete unification of all the forces is a necessary military act. I could quite understand that it might have been thought desirable to appoint a General-in-Chief of all the Armies in the field if there had been any outstanding personality—such as the Duke of Wellington in 1814; or as Count von Moltke in 1870. If in their war with France the Germans had had any allies fighting with them it could be quite understood that such a man as von Moltke might have been appointed Commander-in-Chief of all the fighting forces on that front, or possibly of all Europe. I cannot help thinking that there are many persons who would regard such a plan, if it could have been effected, as preferable to the existing plan which, I confess, as we see it and as it has been described, seems to give the appearance of independent action to our Commander-in-Chief and to the British Army, while in fact it debars them from exercising anything which can be described as independent action on a large scale. I trust that I have not gone over the border line and in any sense asked questions of noble Lords opposite which could be said to have anything to do with military plans. These matters of administration, highly interesting and important and affecting as we all know probably the ultimate fortunes of the

war, are not, in themselves, secret. The better they are the more advisable it should be that the Germans should know precisely in what they consist.

But before I sit down, there is one kindred topic which it is impossible to pass over altogether on an occasion like this. It is a singularly unpleasant subject in itself. I allude to the coincidence, which has been so freely noticed everywhere, of a series of Press attacks the last of them on General Sir William Robertson with the fact of his transfer to another post—a post of some dignity and importance, but not, in itself, surely comparable to the position of Chief of the Imperial General Staff. We are told that it is a coincidence—we hear of the long arm of coincidence. On this occasion it seems to be a very muscular as well as a long arm in its effect. Your Lordships will know the old superstition of the wax figures which were prepared by ill-wishers to individuals and which were slowly melted, the melting being accompanied by a wasting disease in the unhappy subject of the spell. I am afraid wax figures of eminent Statesmen, distinguished Admirals, and not less distinguished Generals are regularly kept in certain newspaper offices. They do not themselves waste away, but their careers waste away with a sort of sinister sameness and certainty, for which it is not, in the opinion of the public and in my own opinion, easy to account. As was said in a well-known quotation, "It is wonderful how these things get into the papers." I do not profess or pretend to unravel cause and effect. When is said, by whom, and where, and how, which causes certain newspapers, in dealing with the careers of individuals, apparently to anticipate the desires and to enforce the resolution of Downing-street I do not pretend to say. There are certain historical puzzles which have never been solved. What exactly brought about the murder of Thomas Becket, and who was entirely responsible for it, remains a matter of some historical doubt. I will not pursue the question further, except to say very gravely that the effect of all this on the public mind is simply deplorable.

Several NOBLE LORDS: Hear, hear.

THE MARQUESS OF CREWE: I can think of nothing which is more likely to shake the faith of the people of this country

than suspicions of this kind unless those suspicions can be completely swept away. It is an odious subject to allude to, and I hate doing it, but I think that it is the duty of men who take part in public affairs to express frankly their opinion on a matter of this sort.

Lastly, my Lords, I am anxious to say that I have no intention of introducing any question of the personal merits or comparative merits of the distinguished soldiers whose names have been brought before the public within the last few days. The noble Earl the Secretary of State for War has before now expressed in almost glowing terms his confidence in, and his high opinion of, Sir William Robertson and Sir Douglas Haig, and I have no reason to suppose that his personal opinion of those officers has in any way altered. Sir William Robertson has gone where he has been ordered, and the only doubt, I am certain, that affects the public mind about him beyond general admiration for the soldierly course which he has taken in going where he is ordered, is the doubt as to whether in this new post sufficient scope will be given for his great powers both as an organiser and as a leader of men. Certainly none of us, I am sure, has the smallest intention of instituting any comparison between him and the highly accomplished and most capable officer who has gone to succeed him as Chief of the General Staff. We all hope that Sir Henry Wilson's tenure of that office will be as successful as it possibly can be, and that he will be able to witness a continual turn for the good of our fortunes in the war. I trust that His Majesty's Government will be able to reply fully to the questions which I have asked, because I am certain that the whole House is anxious to know more about matters which have become a subject of so much public comment and criticism, and which have awakened definite uneasiness in the public mind.

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR WAR (THE EARL OF DERBY): My Lords, before I actually deal with the questions that the noble Marquess has put to me, I desire to say that I associate myself absolutely with what he said with regard to the attacks that are made on men holding responsible positions, especially in the Army and Navy, and who, by the rules of those two Services, are unable to defend themselves in the public Press. There is not the least doubt that nothing is more

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conducive to loss of discipline in our Army and Navy than the bandying about of the names of distinguished commanders and questioning their merits or their demerits. But there is more than that. I intend to speak to a very personal point of view to-day. The position of the holder of any post like mine is made even more difficult than it would be under ordinary circumstances when you have these attacks. They make one reluctant to do even what one thinks right, because one may fear that one may be involved in some intrigue. I am going to put my case as fairly and as fully as I possibly can before your Lordships' House to-night, and I hope that at the end I may at all events be acquitted of being a participator in any action except such as I thought absolutely right and justifiable.

To go to the actual question with regard to the position at Versailles, there is a feeling on the part of some people that what has taken place at Versailles does not conduce to the good conduct of the war, whilst on the other hand there are those who strongly support it. For my own part, I strongly support it. I was in favour of it in the beginning, and from what I have seen of its work I have no doubt that in many respects it has brought about most excellent results. It was essential that we should have some co-ordinating authority. If we had been one Army belonging to one nation, or if our Allies had occupied in relation to us, or we had occupied in relation to our Allies, the same position that Austria does to Germany, then I do not think that it would have been necessary. But we are four Allies—Italy, France, America, and ourselves—each keeping our own Armies as a separate entity, yet at the same time desirous of bringing about such co-operation that there may be practically one mind and one thought directed towards the prosecution of the campaign on the Western front. To my mind, therefore, such a body is essential. Originally it was advisory, but by the resolution unanimously come to at the last meeting of the Supreme War Council certain executive powers were given to it. This decision was arrived at unanimously by the Powers represented. One's hand is a little tied behind one's back, because there are certain things one cannot say, but with regard to the scheme there was absolutely no question of dissension either on the part of the civilians or of the soldiers. Sir William Robertson

could almost claim, I think, to be the originator of the scheme; therefore your Lordships will, I hope, take it from me that there was no doubt about it whatsoever.

As to the administration of the particular scheme, however, it was obvious that there would have to be some executive body which would be able to deal with it. The composition of this executive body was put before the Supreme War Council, and its decision upon it was made there and then. I am not, as your Lordships are aware, a member of the War Cabinet, and I do not attend these conferences. My duty, therefore, is, when these conferences come to resolutions which affect our Army, to act as the agent and to bring any decision that they may come to into line with the Constitution which rules our forces. The scheme, which had necessitated certain executive action being taken by the executive as a whole, required that there should be on that executive some representative who had the legal authority to issue orders to the Commanders of British troops. The Permanent Military Representative, now the Chief of the General Staff and then at Versailles, had no such part, and therefore, when this decision of the Supreme War Council was taken, we had to consider in what way he could be given such powers as would bring him within the Constitution, and to declare at the same time what the relationship was to be as between London and Versailles.

With a view of arriving at this the Prime Minister put forward, on behalf of the War Cabinet, a scheme for consideration. There was no doubt whatever that that scheme brought the whole arrangement within the powers of the Constitution. And although I cannot give all of it, because there is one portion that is confidential, I think I can give enough to enable your Lordships to see that the power left in the hands of the Army Council was a real one. In the first place the Permanent Military Representative at Versailles was to become a member of the Army Council—part and parcel of it. The Chief of the General Staff was to continue to be the supreme military adviser of the Council. The Permanent Military Representative at Versailles was to be in constant communication and consultation with the Chief of the General Staff, but, as he was a member of a body who were discussing many plans, he was given free and un-

fettered liberty to express his views and to discuss those plans. When any advice is formulated by this body, acting as a whole, it has to come home to the Chief of the General Staff for the purpose of being brought before the War Cabinet, and for the Chiefs of the General Staffs to advise the War Cabinet on. There are other provisions to deal with the case of a dispute—let us say, between Sir Douglas Haig and the Council at Versailles; there are ample opportunities given for Sir Douglas Haig to appeal against any such decision, and the War Cabinet, or even the Supreme War Council, would then have to consider it.

It seemed to me then, as it seems to me now, that by this change—the altering of the Order in Council which has been mentioned, and which brings the Chief of the Imperial General Staff back again, if I may say so, into the Army Council, and not having powers which were given to him outside the Army Council; and at the same time the bringing in of the Military Representative at Versailles as his colleague, both of them subject to the Army Council, both of them under me, and with me responsible for them—the control of the Military Representative at Versailles would have been adequately met, and any question regarding the safety of our Army was adequately safeguarded.

The two positions, however, being altered, the position at Versailles being somewhat increased and the position of the Chief of the General Staff being somewhat diminished, it was thought only fair by the Prime Minister that Sir William Robertson should be given the choice of going to Versailles, if he so wished. He declined to go to Versailles; and, having declined that, he remained as Chief of the General Staff. He was then asked whether as Chief of the General Staff he would continue in his office subject to the conditions laid down. Now some people have said—I have seen it stated—that the question of the reduction of his powers by the cancelling of the particular Order in Council was the reason of his resignation. That is not the case: Sir William Robertson absolutely agreed, without the slightest dissension, to that alteration being made.

**LORD BUCKMASTER:** He has denied that he has resigned.

**THE EARL OF DERBY:** I will come to that if I may.

LORD BUCKMASTER: You used the word "resignation," but he denies that he has resigned.

THE EARL OF DERBY: I do not really know, then, what word to use—the alteration in his post. He said that he could not see his way to remain as Chief of the General Staff and accept the relationship which he was asked to accept as between himself and Versailles. I do not think it is a fair way of putting it to say that Sir William Robertson was asked to take either post and refused both. He did not do that. Literally it is true, but he declined to take either post because he thought that the particular scheme was not a workable one.

Now, it is as well to say at this moment what he proposed in its place. He proposed—and, mind you, this is the sole difference of opinion—that on this executive Council he should be our representative. Now, I should like to inform your Lordships that that particular proposal of his had been carefully considered at the Supreme War Council, and had been unanimously turned down, not only by our own people, but by the soldiers and statesmen of all the other countries. It was, therefore, an impossible position; and, from our point of view here, the impossibility was increased by the geographical position that exists. If you are going to have a man in France who may have to take a sudden decision, it is obvious that this man must be in France; and though in France you have General Foch as Chairman of this particular executive, you must remember that it would be quite impossible for our Chief of the Imperial General Staff to be absent from this country for more than a short time. Our Allies are waging only one war; they are waging the war on their own fronts. We are waging more than one war. We have Mesopotamia, we have Palestine, we have East Africa; and it is essential that the Chief of the Imperial General Staff should be at home and at the hand of the Government to advise them at any moment.

I had been carefully through this scheme. I had been through it with military advisers and with civilian advisers, and I had come to the conclusion that it was a perfectly workable scheme. I have always expressed—and I still express—the greatest possible confidence in Sir William Robertson, in his judgment as a strategist; and the high opinion which I have always held of him is enhanced by the courage that he has

shown in adhering to the decision at which he arrived. But here was where, if I may say so, my personal difficulty came in. A scheme proposed and accepted by the whole of the Allies could be upset only by the whole of the Allies. I approved of that scheme. I believed then—and I believe now—that it is a perfectly workable scheme; and the only alternative that was put in front of me was Sir William Robertson's position of "accept my terms or lose my services." A complaint has been made that some delay has occurred in settling this matter. I plead guilty to being the cause of that delay; because I did all that I possibly could to get Sir William Robertson to accept a scheme which, as I have said, I considered perfectly workable. He did not see his way to do this. Now, it seems to me that it then became a question of principle against personality. In the very last speech that I made in a public place I praised Sir William Robertson in every way. I then emphasised one fact—and I emphasise it now—that, whoever the soldier be, the civil authority has to be, and must always remain, supreme; and if the civil authority, acting, as they did in this case, in uniformity with the Inter-Allied Conference, says that a certain thing is to be, then in my opinion no soldier ought to be able to put the alternative either of keeping his services or of reversing the decision arrived at. In the end, therefore, I held to my scheme. I held that I was right, and I hold that I am right now. And when the Government appointed—as they did appoint—Sir Henry Wilson to be Chief of the General Staff, and Sir Henry Rawlinson to be our representative at Versailles, I accepted it because I believed, and shall continue to believe—and I know that in this respect I have Sir Douglas Haig's own opinion—that, given good will (as it will be given), although there may be difficulties ahead, it is a workable scheme, and we are all determined to make it work.

But meanwhile I felt that my strong advocacy of Sir William Robertson had put me into a somewhat ambiguous position, and I placed myself unreservedly in the hands of the Prime Minister by asking him whether he would accept my resignation. He has asked me not to resign. I believe that my colleagues agree with that. I am staying, but through no love of office. Nobody would like to be in office now if he could help it. But, having set my hand to a paper, and having agreed to a scheme, which I still think is a good and a workable

scheme, I have to make good by seeing that scheme through. I believe that I can make good. I know that, under this scheme, no danger whatsoever can come to our Army in France. But if I do not make good, and if there is any reason in my mind for thinking that an alteration ought to be made, then it will be my duty at the earliest opportunity and in the most earnest manner to bring the matter before the War Cabinet, and if necessary before your Lordships' House.

**LORD BUCKMASTER:** My Lords, I feel certain that all your Lordships appreciated the evident anxiety of the noble Earl to give to the House all the information that was in his possession, that he lawfully could give, for the purpose of clearing up a very difficult situation; and I feel satisfied that it was unnecessary for the noble Earl to assure your Lordships that, if he retained the difficult office that he now holds, the sole reason that actuated him was a sense of public duty.

But though I listened attentively to what the noble Earl said, I found myself unable to think that he had cleared up the real difficulties by which this situation is surrounded. He said that the scheme which has led to the removal of Sir William Robertson from the great office that he held was a scheme which was practically originated by Sir William Robertson himself; and that, so far as I can understand, the reason why the country is deprived of services which I think everybody agrees it will be difficult to replace, is because of some disagreement as to the best method of carrying out a scheme upon which there was common consent. That certainly is a new and illuminating light upon the situation. But it seems rather difficult, if the fundamental question is whether or no the uncontrolled power is to remain in the hands of the Chief of the General Staff here, or whether that authority is to be shared and divided with some other authority at Versailles—if that be the fundamental principle at the back of the scheme, it seems quite impossible to understand how there could have been any difference in the method of carrying it out which could have led Sir William Robertson to be removed from the great office that he held.

My Lords, I think that the noble Earl found himself so restricted by the necessarily confidential character of the informa-

tion in his possession that he was not at liberty to place before your Lordships matters that might have made this subject yet more clear. I feel that myself, and appreciate his reticence; but, of course, it prevents the possibility—it may be a good thing that it should—of anything like careful and critical investigation of the actual circumstances that have led up to the present position, and therefore I do not propose myself to embark upon them. One thing remains, and one thing seems clear. The scheme as disclosed may involve—nay more, I think, my Lords, must involve—this, that General Haig may at some critical moment find himself the subject of two different orders, and that he may not know—

**THE EARL OF DERBY:** No, no.

**LORD BUCKMASTER:** Then it must mean this, that the Chief of the General Staff is shorn of the whole of his authority. There can be no other alternative; and if that is the case it seems impossible that Sir William Robertson ever can have approved the scheme, and the reason why he is unable to carry it out becomes perfectly plain. I do not, however, propose to investigate this closely, for the reasons that I have already given. There is no doubt that the country has been startled, and rightly startled, by what has happened. They find that they have been deprived of the services of a man of whom the Secretary of State for War can honestly say that he has the highest possible opinion of his judgment as a strategist; and at this moment, when strategists may not be too plentiful and the need for their work was never greater, it certainly is a calamity, which it is impossible to measure, that by some means the country should have been deprived of the services of a man with such qualifications. Of course, there is more than that. It is not merely that Sir William Robertson commanded, as undoubtedly he did, the confidence of the noble Earl and of all the authorities with whom he was brought in contact: he had obtained to a peculiar degree the confidence of the people of this country. The outstanding merit of his career, the fact that he had succeeded to the great position to which he had attained from humble circumstances, unassisted by any favour or power—that fact has impressed itself indelibly upon the mind of the people, who, if slow to form impressions, are yet slower to give them up.



Now, my Lords, Sir William Robertson's position it certainly is undesirable further to question or to canvass, and what I want to say is a few words about the way in which this startling change has been brought about. If the Government made up their minds that there was some proposal of theirs the execution of which they regarded as essential for the efficient carrying on of this war, they were bound to carry it through without regard to the personal position of any man who stood in their way. To remove a man of the eminence of Sir William Robertson would always be a difficult and very delicate task. It would require courage, but it would be a courage that the country would appreciate, were they quite satisfied that the action that preceded his removal had been merely prompted by those considerations that I have mentioned. It is impossible, however, in the circumstances that have happened, that any such confidence could be felt, and the reason is this.

Let us go back and see what within a few short weeks has been the unhappy history of this controversy. In the first place, we find that the Prime Minister makes a speech at Paris which certainly does not over-eulogise either Sir William Robertson or General Haig. He suggests that there should be some change of authority, and this leaves upon people's minds the impression that there has been an attempt at this Conference to supersede the whole of their authority by the creation of a person in the nature of a Super-General—a person called by a phrase which I very much dislike, namely, a Generalissimo. The Prime Minister comes back and says that this had never been in the contemplation of the Conference, and had never been in their thoughts at all, and for the moment confidence is restored. After a while what is it that happens? There begins a most spiteful and personal attack upon Sir William Robertson in the Press. It begins in the *Weekly Despatch*; it is taken up in the *Daily Mail*—I have not pursued its course, but I have no doubt that it could be found to have been further followed in the *Evening News*. It was not finally adopted by *The Times*. That may have been because of the courage of the staff of *The Times*, or it may have been that they felt that public opinion was running so strongly against them that they did not desire to continue the campaign.

Now, my Lords, it is notorious that every Lord Buckmaster.

one of these newspapers is under the control of Lord Northcliffe. That is a matter of no moment at all, if Lord Northcliffe were wholly dissociated from the Government; but if you find that Lord Northcliffe is the man whom the Government delights to honour, and that the Government is one which he delights to insult, it becomes quite impossible for people outside to understand how this campaign can be continued in the newspapers when he can stop it by lifting his finger, even if he had not lifted his finger as a signal that it should begin, and yet at the very climax that he should be further appointed to a position of honour and confidence under this very Government. It is that which people cannot understand, and I must say I do think it needs some explanation. The Government position would be perfectly plain if they had said at once, "We disapprove of these attacks. It may be that you are at liberty to make them, and there is no power in law by which you can be restrained." That would be right. But they should instantly have said to Lord Northcliffe, "In these circumstances you can have nothing to do with the Government, for attacking a great Government servant who cannot defend himself." Lord Northcliffe, again, was perfectly free to follow this course if he thought—and there was no reason to doubt that he did think—that the course he was following was good for the country; but, once more, he had no right to retain the office of confidential relationship in which he stood to the Government. And, my Lords, I think some people, when they saw the statement recently in the newspapers that he had consented to act in a new capacity, may have wondered in what position of humiliation the Government approached him with the offer?

Then, last night in another place, a statement was made, in answer to a question, that the issues of the *Daily Mail* are before the Public Prosecutor for the purpose of considering what steps should be taken. My Lords, was there ever such a farce? Do the Government take three weeks if they are going to raid the offices of a Labour paper? Did they take three weeks to prosecute Colonel Repington and Mr. Gwynne? The Public Prosecutor is one of the most diligent and active officials in the Government, and I will undertake to say that you could obtain his opinion and his direction within twenty-four hours if you so desire, and that if it really were the

intention to take proceedings against this paper it could have been done before the mischief it had effected had had time to circulate. These are the things which make the people uneasy. They find themselves quite unable to understand how papers, so notoriously influenced by a man who apparently possesses in such a complete and supreme degree the confidence of the Government, can be permitted to go on in this manner, while other papers that have no influence (whose very names I have never before heard) are subject from day to day to severe penalties for matters which must, after all, constitute a far less grave offence.

Let me add one word in conclusion. I sincerely hope that neither the noble Earl (Earl Curzon) should he think fit to answer, or the noble Viscount (Viscount Milner) who sits beside him, will think it is consistent with his dignity to repudiate the idea that he knew anything about this matter or had any control over it. I have never heard any man, not even the most acrid critic of the Government, ever suggest anything whatever of the kind. But, although the principle of divided responsibility in this new Government has been so divided that there is nothing left, the noble Earl will realise, I am certain, that he is a member of the Government. and that every one of these actions cannot possibly be put against the charge of one man alone. They must be actions for which the Government take responsibility, though the individual members may not be the people who are individually responsible. I sincerely trust that the noble Earl will be able to say something—and his ingenuity and his resources are great—which will put some explanation on this matter that people outside can understand. At the present moment they feel that Sir William Robertson has not really been removed as he should have been because he stood in the way of the carrying out of the Government scheme, but he has been removed through the instrumentality of newspaper attacks—newspaper attacks similar to those which they believe struck down Admiral Jellicoe just as they were directed against Lord Kitchener. Feeling the difficulty in which this country stands and the peril that lies before us, they will not be reassured unless the Government can give them some confident promise that these actions, which in my opinion have disgraced English journalism, shall not be repeated.

THE LORD PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL (EARL CURZON OF KEDLESTON) : My Lords, the noble Marquess who leads the Opposition addressed your Lordships at the beginning of those proceedings with his usual moderation, with perfect good taste, and with an admirable sense of fair play. I have personally nothing to criticise, although I may have something to answer, in what fell from his lips. The noble and learned Lord who has just spoken has addressed your Lordships' House in a rather more polemical vein. He was not uninterested—indeed, he was deeply concerned—in the realities of the case which is under examination in your Lordships' House this afternoon. He complained that certain matters still remain obscure. He asked me to clear up certain difficulties which existed in his own mind, and which he was under the impression would remain in the minds of the public after the proceedings of this afternoon. I will endeavour to the best of my ability to satisfy him in these respects.

But he went a little beyond that, and a good deal of his speech was devoted, not to the examination of the particular military issues raised by the decisions of Versailles or by the conduct of Sir William Robertson here. He was inclined to throw—indeed, he deliberately did throw—responsibility for much that he finds regrettable and even deplorable in recent events upon the Prime Minister and upon Lord Northcliffe. I do not conceive it to be any part of my duty to stand here in defence of what Lord Northcliffe or Lord Northcliffe's papers may have written. I have no knowledge of his degree of responsibility for what appears in his newspapers; and when the noble and learned Lord speaks, as he did—as he confidently did—of the confidential relations that prevailed between Lord Northcliffe and His Majesty's Government, these are relations of which I, at any rate, have no cognisance whatever.

Then the noble and learned Lord alluded to one particular incident in which a reference had been made to the Public Prosecutor with regard to articles that had appeared, I think, in the *Daily Mail*, and the noble and learned Lord seemed to suggest that there had been some delay—whether deliberate or accidental, I do not know; he almost suggested it was deliberate—in making that reference, and he said, Why do you spend three weeks in taking this action? My Lords, the noble and

learned Lord was quite misinformed as to the facts. My recollection—and my noble friend Lord Milner will correct me if I am wrong—is that in that case, as in others, the moment a writing appears which is thought by the Government to be open to the suspicions of which I speak, reference is made at once. Reference was so made in this particular case, and it was because we were advised that there was no case for prosecution that we were unable to proceed.

LORD BUCKMASTER: Will the noble Earl forgive me? The statement in another place was that they were now under consideration.

EARL CURZON OF KEDLESTON: I do not know whether the noble and learned Lord is referring to something that has happened since the articles of which I am speaking.

LORD BUCKMASTER: I should like to explain to what I did refer. I referred to an answer which I saw reported in one of the papers this morning to a question in another place last night. It might have been that the answer was misreported—I cannot say—but the answer I saw was that they were under consideration.

EARL CURZON OF KEDLESTON: I do not know to what the noble and learned Lord is referring.

LORD BUCKMASTER: To the articles in the *Daily Mail*.

EARL CURZON OF KEDLESTON: Which articles?

LORD BUCKMASTER: The articles, as I understand, against Sir William Robertson.

EARL CURZON OF KEDLESTON: I think it must be some other articles. I thought that the noble and learned Lord was alluding to certain articles which appeared in the *Daily Mail* between three and four weeks ago, to which reference was made at that time. As to anything which has transpired during the past few days I cannot speak, not having read the answer given in the House of Commons to which the noble and learned Lord refers. I will endeavour to supplement the observations that were made by my noble friend the Secretary of State for War, and give the

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noble and learned Lord the further information that he desires. Let me say this, that I think any member of your Lordships' House is quite entitled to ask that this situation, complex and obscure as it must inevitably be in some respects because of the reticence that has to be observed, should be made as clear as the exigencies of the public service render possible.

I think I need only allude in a passing sentence to one portion of the speech of my noble friend the Secretary of State for War—to that section of his speech in which he vindicated his personal conduct. No one who knows him would suspect him of any lack of loyalty to any officers serving under him. Every one of us knows that he did his best to retain the services of Sir William Robertson for the Army Council and for His Majesty's Government, and no one could imagine for a moment that, as regards the change in the position of the Chief of the Imperial General Staff and publication of the Order in Council, my noble friend was animated by any desire to magnify the authority of the office which he himself holds. As he told us, he is sincerely convinced that the scheme agreed upon at Versailles is not only a practicable scheme, but is the best in the circumstances, and, whatever officer works in the responsible position of Chief of the Imperial General Staff, you may be sure that my noble friend will do his best to carry it into successful operation.

In the few remarks I have to make, I will endeavour to treat the case in its broadest aspect. It is quite true that this matter has got tangled up and overlaid with all sorts of minor, petty, personal, and trivial issues. I, for my part, will do my best to keep it clear of all those seaweeds into which it has got. Here let me say that personally I most entirely endorse the language employed by the noble Marquess the Leader of the Opposition in relation to Press attacks upon important men. When politicians are the subject of these attacks nobody very much minds, least of all the politicians themselves. It is part of the business of public life. They have the opportunity to reply, and liberal discount is made by readers for any such invective of which they are made the victim. It is quite different in the case of officers who are serving their country in either of the great combatant services. For my part, I think the kind of attacks that have been made upon more than one distinguished

officer in journals which have been named this afternoon are reprehensible in the highest degree. I know of no excuse. They seem to me to be utterly deplorable; and when the noble Marquess who leads the Opposition said that their effect on the public mind is deplorable, he used language which in my judgment—

LORD BALFOUR OF BURLEIGH: Why do not the Government stop them?

EARL CURZON OF KEDLESTON: If the noble Lord will allow me to proceed—is fully justified by the circumstances of the case. The noble Lord who has just interrupted says, "Why do not the Government stop them?" Not five minutes ago I endeavoured to point out to the noble and learned Lord opposite the circumstances in which the Government have sought to act, but were unable to do so because of the advice which had been given to them.

Now, if I may, I will pass on to the main question before your Lordships' House. I agree with the noble Marquess who leads the Opposition that this is not a question that has to do with the merits of individuals; nor is it a matter which has to do with—and I hope your Lordships will absolutely sever it from—any question of military strategy. This is not a question of the Western Front against the Eastern Front, or of one plan of military operations rather than another. It is a question of broad military principle as to the conduct of the war. Now we may look at that principle, and form our opinion upon it, from two points of view. There is first the home aspect of the principle. No one in your Lordships' House will deny—it has been admitted by every speaker in the debate, and I remember that the principle was stated in the most effective language by Lord Buckmaster in a speech which he made some two weeks ago—that the civil power is supreme, and that it is the Cabinet which is responsible for the general conduct of the war. That duty and responsibility they accept; it can be devolved on no one else, and if the Government are satisfied that a change is required, either in the High Command or high official office—as has more than once happened in the course of the present war—it is for them to assume responsibility, to act, and to defend their conduct if it be impugned. I need not waste another sentence upon that.

Now I come to the foreign aspect of the case, and here the principle for which the Government have been contending is that of greater unity of military control. For this, of course, some sacrifice of independence is required by every one of the parties to the Alliance. Towards that goal, we have been steadily moving during the whole period for which I, at any rate, have been in office. Had we attained it earlier in the day the Alliance might, I think, have been spared some of the reverses which, owing to the superior advantages, resources, and acumen of the enemy in this respect, have fallen one after the other on some of the weaker of our Allies. We have been groping our way—slowly, perhaps—to a single, united, co-ordinated, as against an isolated, dispersed, and incoherent military control. The first decisive step that was taken in this direction was the agreement that followed upon the Rapolla Conference, and took effect in the constitution of the Supreme War Council at Versailles. I need not, I think, say anything in exposition of that stage, because it was fully explained in another place and in your Lordships' House, and I think the principle of the constitution of that Council met with general, if not universal, agreement. The second stage was attained at Paris in the proceedings a fortnight ago:

The noble Marquess was quite right in saying that a new situation had developed, and that from it a new scheme, or a new form of the old scheme, emerged. The facts are well known to all of us. A great blow is believed to be impending in that quarter. We are in the midst of the hush that may precede the hurricane. It was deemed essential by the Allies that some authority should be constituted which should deal with the situation if it did arise, should concentrate forces, move forces and direct forces to the point of danger wherever it might occur. It was also necessary that the decisions of that body, however constituted, should be speedy, and that the actions taken upon them should be prompt. This was no new or startling development of the situation. It had long been foreseen. It was inevitable. I think that we may describe it as common sense; and upon this principle—upon the general scheme, as I think my noble friend more than once described it—all the Allies and all the military advisers of the Allies were agreed. There was no difference upon that whatso-

ever. Let the House be quite clear upon that.

But while every one, both military and civil, was agreed upon the principle, it was quite possible to differ upon the machinery devised to carry that principle into effect. The question at once arose, What should that authority be? My noble friend the Secretary of State for War alluded to a plan which was put forward at the meeting of the Supreme Council in Paris—put forward, I think, under the auspices of the French—under which it was proposed that the new authority to exercise these powers should be composed of the Chiefs of the General Staffs of the various Allied Powers. That was a proposal which, as we know, found much favour from our own military adviser, Sir William Robertson. When that proposal was put forward it was adversely criticised by the representatives of all the other Allies, and you can quite understand for what reasons it was so treated. In the first place, the United States could not send their Chief of General Staff because he is thousands of miles away across the water. Italy could not spare her Chief of General Staff, because he is wanted in their own country. We could not spare ours for the reasons stated by Lord Derby—namely, that our Chief of General Staff is our daily adviser, not merely upon France or Flanders, but upon every aspect of the war in every theatre of war, as he comes to the Cabinet table every morning. Further, it became clear, as the matter was more examined, that the creation of this new body as suggested, composed entirely of the Chiefs of General Staffs, would really dislocate rather than facilitate the movements of the machine, because it would be creating a new body whose relations with the military body of experts already existing at Versailles might be very difficult to compose. In these circumstances this proposal—I hope that I make myself clear, the proposal that the new authority should consist of the Chiefs of General Staffs of all the Allied countries—was dropped by common consent.

Then the Council had to find an alternative. There is one alternative which they did not discuss, for the reason that it had been already condemned. It is the alternative mentioned by the noble Marquess, Lord Crewe—namely, that there should be a single command, a single Generalissimo, of all the Allied Forces. To that there is the outstanding objection, mentioned by him, that there does not happen to] be

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among the Allied Forces any individual possessing the commanding military personality and reputation which would render his choice equally acceptable to all the Powers. There are other objections which will easily come into our minds, but which, as the matter was not pursued, it is unnecessary for me to mention this afternoon. But the objections to a single commander, to a Generalissimo, did not, it must be clear to your Lordships, apply to a single authority and to a central control, and therefore it emerged, by a natural and almost inevitable process, that the body to be entrusted with these powers of acting in an exceptional emergency should be the body already existing at Versailles and consisting of the military representatives of the various Allied Powers.

The only change that was made in the composition of this body was that, for the purpose of sittings to discuss and to decide upon the matters of particular importance to which I refer, General Foch, the French Chief of General Staff, was substituted for the General—General Weygand by name—who is the French representative upon that body. Let me be quite clear upon this point. For all ordinary purposes General Weygand remains the French representative upon that body just as General Wilson was recently, and General Sir Henry Rawlinson is now, exactly under the same conditions, our representative upon that body. But for the exceptional circumstances which may arise from time to time General Weygand is replaced by General Foch as French representative. I think that the reason for that is obvious. It was not merely a compliment to General Foch's position and service during the war, but it was due to the fact that General Foch is on the spot, and it was really unreasonable and unnecessary to require General Weygand to refer for authority to his Chief of General Staff when that Chief of General Staff, being on the spot, could come there and give the authority himself. It was obvious that such a solution would really promote promptitude both of decision and of action. I think that I am right in saying that this is the only change that has been made in the composition of this body to whom these powers are to be given.

This proposal was accepted in conference by the whole of the Allies without dissent. It was not protested against at the time by General Robertson. General Robertson had already expressed his view in favour of the other solution, that of the Chiefs of

General Staffs, and he did not, for reasons best known to himself, think it necessary to protest against this decision, which was accordingly unanimous. As regards Field-Marshal Haig, who also was present and had already been consulted upon the matter, he, as the noble Earl the Secretary of State has told us, has declared that this is a scheme under which he is perfectly prepared to work. You may say that this is a system of divided control. Yes, it is to a certain extent. If power of any sort must be given to Paris to act in the exceptional circumstances to which I refer, there is a certain division of authority; but, on the other hand, it is nothing like the division of authority that would have ensued had your representative at Paris been obliged to refer before coming to a decision, or before acting upon that decision in common with his colleagues, to the Chief of the Imperial General Staff at home. You can imagine, my Lords, how much more fruitful in delay that division of authority would have been. It would have destroyed all corporate action and authority at Paris at the very moment when in all probability it was most essential.

This scheme which was decided upon by the Allies at Paris may have been a good or a bad one. I do not think that it is necessary for me to give an opinion—my opinion would be quite worthless upon the point—but it is undoubted that it was a far better scheme than anything which preceded it, and it also is the fact that it was unanimously accepted by the whole of our Allies, and by none with greater insistence or urgency than the Americans, who are now entering with such force into the war. This decision left two posts to be filled—the post at Paris and the post in London. I have explained, and I hope clearly defined, the nature of the post in Paris. As to the post in London, some question has been raised as to the modification of the Order in Council under which Sir William Robertson assumed office in the month of January, 1916. I very well remember those circumstances. They were quite exceptional. A power was given under the Order in Council to General Robertson which had been enjoyed by none of his predecessors. I remember having often heard it stated that the powers so given were anomalous and illogical in themselves and undoubtedly they placed the Army Council and the Secretary of State for War in a somewhat difficult position. But your Lordships will observe that the

need for modification of those powers arose out of the altered circumstances in Paris. The Military Representative in Paris could not carry out orders while the Order in Council remained. I do not think I need labour the point, because, as my noble friend Lord Derby more than once stated in his speech, Sir William Robertson at no stage took objection to the suggested modification of the powers of the Imperial General Staff. To that he attached no importance, and any idea that an attempt was made to derogate from his position or prestige in this respect, or that such an attempt, if made, was resented by him, is, I can assure your Lordships, without any foundation.

There being these two posts, about which I hope I have been clear, Sir William Robertson was offered the choice of either. I must say that I hoped myself very earnestly indeed that he would accept the Paris post; and, in proportion as I heard him and others argue that for certain purposes greater power was now concentrated in Paris, so did I hope that he, with his great authority, experience, and influence, would be willing to fill that rôle. He did not. As regards the place at home, his reasons were equally clear for refusing. I will state in a moment what those reasons were. But let me say one word about the resignation. I confess that I think the point made by the noble and learned Lord (Lord Buckmaster) is without real substance. I see that Sir William Robertson says in the papers that he did not resign; but if two posts are created, or re-created in a new form, and the officer filling one of them in the old form declines to accept either, I must confess it is very difficult to describe his action by any other word than that of "resignation." And if the word "dismissal" is used, I must most emphatically and earnestly repudiate the idea that at any moment there has been, or could be, on the part of the Government, any parting in an abrupt or imperious way with an officer of the character, service, and distinction of Sir William Robertson.

Sir William Robertson's reasons for refusing either or both of these offices were, I think, perfectly clear, and entirely honourable to him. He refused the post at Paris because he thought that our Military Representative there should be either the Chief of the Imperial General Staff under the proposal that I have before described, or that he should be a deputy of the Chief of the General Staff, subordinate to, and

taking his orders from him. The geographical difficulties in the way of that being done have already been referred to. And he refused the home appointment because he could not accept responsibility for executive action which was not his own. He was not content, as regards Paris, to accept a position which has been accepted and is being acted upon by the Military Representatives of all the other Allied Powers—of America, of Italy, and, with the slight modification that I have mentioned, of France. And as regards the position at home, I do not presume to dictate for a moment the action of an officer such as General Robertson. If he was unable to continue to fill the post of Chief of the Imperial General Staff at home, unless he had supreme, absolute, and unfettered control in France, well, we cannot dispute his judgment in that respect, and he was entitled to act upon it. What I do submit to your Lordships is this, that in these circumstances the Government had no other alternative but to accept the resignation of General Robertson.

One point let me make clear before I conclude. It is a point, I think, which was made by the noble and learned Lord, Lord Buckmaster, about the position of Sir Douglas Haig and the extent to which his powers might be affected by the decisions that have been arrived at. It is a perfectly fair point, and I believe I can answer it. I think it might be inferred from the acceptance of the scheme by the Field-Marshal that no such diminution or disparagement of his authority was really involved. The question put by the noble and learned Lord was, Will the Field-Marshal Commanding in France remain under the orders of the Chief of the Imperial Staff here to the same extent that he was before? The answer to that is in the affirmative. The relations between him and the Army Council, including the Chief of the General Staff, remain the same as they were before, except in so far as they are modified, if they are modified at all, by the modification of the Order in Council. And be it remembered that the Commander-in-Chief in France has never been in the habit of receiving orders from the Chief of the General Staff here as to the movements of his troops. That is a matter in his own hands, and in his own control.

LORD BERESFORD: Will it be now?  
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EARL CURZON OF KEDLESTON: Yes, I was just going to answer that question. He will retain exactly the same control over his troops as he does now. The only difference in the position is that the military authorities in Paris will have at their disposition certain troops from the Allied forces which they can either add in certain contingencies to the troops of the Field-Marshal commanding the British troops, or take away and send to another point where they may be required. That is the only difference in the situation, and I hope that the noble and learned Lord will now understand how and why it is that the Field-Marshal commanding in France has been in a position to accept this scheme.

LORD BUCKMASTER: I understand that he is deprived of the control of his reserves.

EARL CURZON OF KEDLESTON: No.

LORD BUCKMASTER: Then I do not see what the Council does.

EARL CURZON OF KEDLESTON: If I find it a little difficult to go into this question of the reserves—

LORD BUCKMASTER: I thought that was what the noble Earl had said.

EARL CURZON OF KEDLESTON: I do not think I used the word.

LORD BUCKMASTER: I thought you did, but I beg your pardon.

EARL CURZON OF KEDLESTON: I thought I had made myself clear, but if I did not, and the noble and learned Lord requires any further elucidation, I will endeavour to give it to him. I have only to say, in conclusion, that the decision of His Majesty's Government involved no disparagement of or loss of confidence whatsoever in Sir William Robertson. I have had the honour of sitting in the same council chamber with that distinguished General for more than two years, and he has continuously shown there an organising capacity, a courage, a force of character, and an independence of judgment which have enabled him to render invaluable assistance to the Government and to the State. We all of us know that General Robertson is a great soldier. I have had

the opportunity of seeing that he has also been a great servant of the State; and nowhere has Sir William Robertson acted with greater loyalty than in this willingness, in the circumstances which I have described, to accept the Command to which he has been appointed. Sir William Robertson, though he leaves for the time being our service in Downing-street, carries away not merely the esteem and admiration of his colleagues but the gratitude of the whole community for what he has done.

We have to accept the situation in the form in which it has developed and to go on with the war; and I think it would be a great misfortune if we allowed ourselves to be diverted from the strenuous prosecution of the war by the pursuance of personal or political controversies. There is not, so far as I am aware, any crisis. Sir William Robertson had acted in a perfectly legitimate way in the conscientious discharge of what he felt to be his duty in the circumstances; and in view of what passed at Paris and of our agreement with our Allies, I hope I have successfully shown to your Lordships that His Majesty's Government acted with a full sense of responsibility, and in the only manner that was open to them, after the obligations into which they had entered at Versailles.

LORD BUCKMASTER: Will the House permit me to verify the quotation that I made? I am sure that the noble Earl will be glad to know exactly what transpired. A Question was asked of the Home Secretary, whether Mr. Lovat Fraser's article, attacking Sir William Robertson, which appeared in the *Daily Mail* of January 21 last, was submitted to and passed by the Censor; and, if not, whether any action was to be taken? The answer was, "The article in question was not submitted to the Press Bureau; it is under the consideration of the Director of Public Prosecutions." May I add that I appreciate that, with the many cares on the mind of the noble Earl, he would not remember a thing so small as that?

EARL CURZON OF KEDLESTON: But I do remember it perfectly. My recollection is this, that the reference was made something like three weeks ago.

LORD BUCKMASTER: My point was that this matter had been for over three weeks before the Public Prosecutor, and that, had it been desired to proceed, his answer could have been obtained certainly

in three days. I understood the noble Earl to say, in answer, that the matter had been considered and dealt with by the Public Prosecutor, and that it was no longer under his consideration. But the answer is that it is under the consideration of the Public Prosecutor.

THE EARL OF DERBY: May I say that I do not know why that answer was given. As a matter of fact, the question was submitted at once to the Public Prosecutor, and he intimated that he did not think a prosecution would lie.

VISCOUNT CHAPLIN: Who gave the answer in the House of Commons?

LORD BUCKMASTER: The Home Secretary, the person responsible for prosecution.

VISCOUNT MIDLETON: My Lords, I do not propose to carry on further the discussion in which the noble and learned Lord has just taken part; but I do not think that it will be an impeachment of the fullness and the frankness of the explanations of the two noble Earls who have spoken from the opposite side of the House if I say that even after those explanations the whole subject appears to me to be left in a very unsatisfactory position. We all agree as to the great loss which the country is going to sustain by the withdrawal of Sir William Robertson, but we are left absolutely without any hope by the Government that his services may be retained, or used, in the main and critical position in which they have hitherto been at the disposal of the country. In these discussions about the Press, everybody is agreed that attacks on Generals and Admirals are greatly to be deprecated; but we have heard nothing from the Ministerial Bench to justify us in hoping that steps will be taken which will prevent this sort of thing going on in the future.

Several NOBLE LORDS: Hear, hear.

VISCOUNT MIDLETON: Please do not let it be supposed that I am impeaching either the ability or the efficiency of the distinguished owners of various journals who are at present serving in the Government. I am the last man to wish to say a word in this House deprecating the action of the Prime Minister in calling to his assistance all the ability which he can



command at the present moment. But is it not obvious, if every month some fresh newspaper proprietor is added to the ranks of the Government, that it is impossible to suppose that the Government are going to spend their whole time prosecuting their own colleagues? We have hardly opened our papers during the last few days without seeing that some gentleman whose distinction has been in connection with the Press has been given a post in which the most intimate knowledge might come to him personally. It is absolutely impossible that a man should stand in two different capacities—knowing on the one side, and not being held responsible for what appears in his newspapers on the other side. I hope that it will be clearly understood that all newspaper proprietors who are honoured, or who make the great sacrifice of their time in order to serve the Government at this critical moment, will at the same time enter into honourable undertakings that they are not responsible for what is going on in their newspapers. Nobody ever asks that a man should give up his private business when he joins the Government; but nobody has even supposed that a gentleman holding a great position in the commercial world—such as the noble Lord, Lord Rhondda, held before he joined the Government—would at the same time that he was a Minister be responsible for the great commercial operations which he had hitherto controlled. I am aware that Lord Rhondda has given up an immense amount of private work in order to carry out a most difficult, and, perhaps, thankless task. Therefore I am not saying it in any way as a matter of attack. I say merely that the two things are incompatible, and that it is absolutely impossible for the two positions to be held at the same time.

I desire to say a few words only on two points; because I feel that it will be necessary for us to return to this discussion, with fuller information, on another occasion. I see one very grave point which I will mention for the consideration of the Government. I wonder whether your Lordships noted that in his speech the Secretary of State for War told us he had to act simply as the agent of the Government? Sir William Robertson and his colleagues had to go to Versailles. Sir William Robertson and other members of the Government sit on the Army Council. The Secretary of State for War, who is supreme over Sir William Robertson, whose business it is, not to dictate policy, but to

*Viscount Midleton.*

collate the opinions of his military adviser<sup>s</sup> and to give the orders on which the Chief of the General Staff acts—the Secretary of State for War is neither aware of what has taken place in France, except at second-hand; nor is he aware, except at second-hand, of what has taken place at 10, Downing-street. I look upon the position as an impossible one. Nothing is more likely to lead to these complications, which involve—temporarily only, I hope—the loss of one of the greatest military intellects which has ever been employed in the public service in my lifetime, than the fact that Sir William Robertson was present and had to take, perhaps, one idea of what the result of the colloquies at Versailles would be, and the Secretary of State for War hears only some days afterwards and at second-hand what has taken place. I can see how these things have arisen; but I urge the noble Earl the Leader of the House, who is a great master of efficiency, somehow or other to sweep away an arrangement which is altogether inefficient.

The Secretary of State for War requires, and should have, a seat on the War Council. Let me compare his position with that of the Chancellor of the Exchequer. The Chancellor of the Exchequer has an immense amount of work in the House of Commons. He happens to have had no previous military experience; and he certainly is not in daily touch, as is the Secretary of State for War, with military affairs. Yet the Chancellor of the Exchequer is expected, giving a sort of by-product of his time, to be present at the War Council, while the Secretary for War told us only this evening that he acted as agent of the Government to convey the decisions taken by the Council at whose meetings he was not present.

THE EARL OF DERBY: I must contradict, if I may, the noble Viscount. As regards Paris, that is perfectly true; but as regards the War Cabinet, I attend every one of its meetings and am present throughout when any matters connected with the military situation are under discussion. I do not, naturally, stay for the discussions regarding other Departments, which do not concern me. But whenever there are discussions on military matters, I am there from beginning to end.

VISCOUNT MIDLETON: If that is so, I think it is unlucky that the noble Earl was not also present at Versailles, because

I imagine that matters had gone too far before they reached him for him to intervene. After all, the proof of the pudding is in the eating. We are in the presence of a very serious difficulty—the great difficulty of which Lord Curzon told us—that there is to be a certain division of control; and I will only say, in passing, that division of control affects this country far more acutely than it does Italy, or France, or America, which is not yet so fully engaged in the war, and is not responsible for so large a front as we are. That in itself give us cause for anxiety. The noble Earl said that if Sir William Robertson's own plan had been adopted, of a Chief of Staff who should be at the same time at Versailles and in London, which he pointed out was impossible, there might be differences between London and Versailles. My fear is that there may be difficulties between Versailles and Paris and St. Omar. If the time comes when we are allowed to discuss matters in Secret Session, I may be able to supply the Government with some information which even they may not have at their command.

Another cause for anxiety is this. Lord Derby gave us in the most frank manner a statement as to how it was that Sir William Robertson had to give way, or to withdraw, or resign, or whatever the proper expression may be. I dare say he may remember a remark which I think was made by Lord Macaulay—namely, that if Mr. Pitt had succeeded his elder brother and become a member of this House during all the European complications, it would have been almost the same as if the Duke of Wellington had been withdrawn from the Peninsula in order to become the Governor of Chelsea Hospital. I believe that nine Englishmen out of every ten feel that the withdrawal of Sir William Robertson and sending him to a minor command in Great Britain is one of the most lamentable and unfortunate episodes that could possibly have occurred. I do not think any member of this House can remember any man who, previously comparatively unknown, has for so long a period commanded so very great an amount of public confidence, and the testimony to whom we have heard this evening makes it appear to us absolutely necessary that by some means or other he should be recalled to office.

My Lords, I am not going to say any more about these attacks, but I confess I do agree with the sentiments of approval which your Lordships expressed when Lord

Buckmaster, a few moments ago, said, "Practically yesterday we had attacks on Lord Jellicoe, and he went; to-day on Sir William Robertson, and he goes"; to-morrow it may be Admiral Beatty and Sir Douglas Haig. We do not want to exhaust the whole of our military and naval experts—names of men in whom the Army and the Navy have confidence. I do not believe anybody desires it less than the Government. But it is simply because these subjects fill us with profound anxiety—not so far as I am concerned with suspicion—lest the best is not attempted to be done, that we desire to reserve judgment as to whether the step which has been taken is a wise one, and we ask the noble Earl the Leader of the House not to shut his mind to the possibility that at an early date we may return to this subject. If he desires that such discussion should not take place publicly, I am quite certain that your Lordships would be equally glad in Secret Session to put before the Government such information and advice as your Lordships may have in order that there may be no repetition of the difficulties which certainly have been the subject of profound disappointment to the country.

LORD BERESFORD: My Lords, I viewed with great anxiety the resignation of Sir William Robertson, but I am far more anxious since hearing the speeches of Lord Curzon and Lord Derby, because they both admitted that this new scheme is to be divided military control. With divided military control you are going to lead straight to chaos. We have not been told who is to be senior and who is to give the orders. There is to be a Chief of the Staff in London, there is to be Lord Derby, there is to be some information which is to be referred from the officer at Versailles to the Chief of Staff and Lord Derby, and on other occasions, although Lord Curzon was not very clear about it, the officer at Versailles is to give the orders; that is to say, for fighting. He has to have charge of the reserves or to be able to shift the reserves, French or English, where he likes. You are going to have divided control. Sir William Robertson left—whether he was dismissed or resigned I do not enter into—but he has left. He is a man in whom the whole country has had confidence, and yet at a time when we are going to enter upon the greatest battle of the war—that is the moment, when you are crossing the stream, that you select for changing horses.

I think Sir William Robertson was perfectly right to leave. To an officer who is asked to undertake any plan that he does not think is sound, which he believes will lose his Army or his country, there is only one of two alternatives. He must refuse to undertake that plan. He should resign, and if the Government do not agree with him, the Government are absolutely right to get rid of him. Let me take my own case. It comes to the same thing, although it was in peace time, and therefore not so important. When I was in command of the Channel Fleet, the Fleet was divided into three. There were three Naval controls. I expostulated again and again, and said it would be fatal, in time of war. I also complained about the trade routes, and I told the Government, again and again, that our danger would be our food supply in time of war. The Government did not agree with me, and they were perfectly right to dismiss me. The way they dismissed me was most ignoble, and I felt it keenly, and so did the Service, but when you are dismissed as a soldier or a sailor your first duty is self-abnegation. The only point to which I will now refer is the fact that things I then prophesied have come true—namely, in the matter of food. I am sure that Sir William Robertson will not blame the Government if we have, as I think we shall have, disaster, if they stick to their present plan. Why should not Sir William Robertson have his deputy at Versailles? General Foch has, and I believe all the other Governments have their deputies at Versailles.

Lord Curzon made a great point that the Allies wished this scheme. Yes, but we have to think of ourselves. If this appointment is so necessary why could not the Chief of the Staff be sent to Versailles. Let him remain there if he is to give these orders. He was a big man, but the Government could have ordered him to go there, and that arrangement would have been very effective. In my humble opinion Sir William Robertson is absolutely right to decline altogether to take either one of these positions where there was dual military control. I look forward with the gravest anxiety to this new disposition. I think you will have confusion. I think you will have what you have got already—great want of confidence among the soldiers in the trenches owing to this cowardly Press campaign. The noble Lord shakes his head. I have seen many officers and many men who read in the evening what

*Lord Beresford.*

you read in the morning and they see that so many thousands of men have been massacred by bad leadership, according to this Press campaign. I am amazed that the Government do not say this has got to stop. We shall have it again. I was subjected to it for months. There was no abuse too great. Questions concerning my seamanship and ability were put in the most ruffianly way in the Press before I was superseded. I did not care a bit. It was peace time. It makes a great difference in war time. You saw the same thing in the case of Admiral Jellicoe. It is a disgrace that some noble Lords who own this Press and are in the Government should have the power and should black-guard these officers in the way they do, when these noble Lords are in the Government and see the Prime Minister every day. I ask your Lordships if it is not a disgrace which ought to be stopped? My noble friend Lord Curzon smiles, but he knows perfectly well I am right. As one who knows Sir William Robertson very intimately I can say that no words that have been spoken from that Bench can be too great in praise of that officer. He has come out with flying colours now. According to all the principles of fighting he was perfectly right if he did not like a plan to say he would not undertake it. The Government were also perfectly right to dismiss him if they did not agree with him. I have ventured to cite my own case, and I hope that Sir William Robertson will not have his fears realised as mine have been with regard to the food supply.

#### THE CHAIRMAN OF COMMITTEES.

EARL CURZON OF KEDLESTON: My Lords, I beg to make the Motion standing in my name.

Moved, That the Lord Kintore (*E. Kintore*) be appointed to take the Chair in all Committees of this House in the absence of the Viscount Hutchinson (*E. Donoughmore*); that the Lord Kintore do take the Chair in all Committees of the Whole House unless where it shall have been otherwise directed by the House; that the Lord Kintore do also take the Chair in all Committees upon Private Bills and other matters unless where it shall have been otherwise directed by the House.—(*Earl Curzon of Kedleston.*)

On Question, Motion agreed to, and ordered accordingly.

## THE MINISTRY OF FOOD.

VISCOUNT CHAPLIN rose to ask His Majesty's Government whether they can give approximately the total cost of the Ministry of Food from the time of its establishment up to the present time. The noble Viscount said: My Lords, I have not the slightest intention of raising any debate on this Question, but there are two things I want to say. The first is to express my regret to the noble Lord, the Food Controller, that I should have selected to-day quite inadvertently, because, owing to my lack of knowledge of the practice of your Lordships' House, I was under the impression that the Question would be reached at half-past four. If I had known that it was to be delayed I would certainly have sought some other opportunity of raising the Question instead of keeping the noble Lord here all this time. The other thing is that I have received numbers of communications from all parts of the country from people who were under the impression that I was going to raise the whole question of our Food Supply to-day. Many have reached me since I came to the House, and two more since I left for a few moments a short time ago. I wish to state publicly to-night that a Motion on this subject of which I have given notice is on the Paper for Wednesday, February 27, when I hope to move the Resolution which appears in my name. All I have now to do is to ask the Question as it stands on the Paper, on which I desire to have the information if I can get it. Again, I say that I regret that I should have unfortunately selected this opportunity of asking the Question.

THE FOOD CONTROLLER (LORD RHONDDA): My Lords, the Question on the Notice Paper asks the Government if they can give approximately the total cost on the Ministry of Food from the time of its establishment up to the present time. The cost from December last year when the Ministry was formed to the end of December this year, including both months, is practically £153,000. But if I left it at that I think I should give the House an entirely wrong impression as to the cost of the Department at the present time. This is a new Department. Naturally, at the outset, before our activities really came into anything like full operation—they have not done that yet, I may say—the cost was small, but it has been growing ever since. I think, perhaps, it would be more in

accordance with the wishes of the noble Viscount if I tell him the cost for December last. The expenditure during that month was £42,000. That includes salaries, the cost of investigation, incidental expenses, and the Food Campaign. The cost has naturally been gradually increasing over the whole of the past twelve months since the Ministry was first established, and it will certainly continue to increase for some little time to come.

VISCOUNT CHAPLIN: Likely to increase?

LORD RHONDDA: It is likely to continue to increase for some time. Increasing expenditure will be incurred for instance in connection with the rationing scheme. It is impossible to estimate the increased cost until we know how far the organisations set up with local authorities will have to be increased. It is hoped—and I trust this is not merely the expression of a pious wish—that all direct and indirect administrative costs will be covered by margins received in connection with the sale of commodities. The cost may appear to noble Lords to be high, and as I say it is a growing cost, but it is small on the immense business that we do—on turnover if I may so describe it—in obtaining supplies and in distributing the food for 45,000,000 people, which involve an enormous sum. I have no close estimate of what the food consumption would amount to in value for the whole country, but it probably exceeds £700,000,000, or at the rate of over £60,000,000 a month, and, having regard to that, the expenditure on the administrative expenses of the Food Ministry is considerably less than one-tenth of one per cent. It must be remembered that the expenditure of the Ministry covers not only the case of commodities purchased for retail, but also the controlling of maximum prices and distribution, in addition to the enforcement of orders and propaganda: It may interest the noble Lord to know that the cost would have been considerably larger were it not for the fact that a number of business men give their services to the Department free of remuneration. The staff is, of course, a very large one at present. The headquarters staff of the Ministry of Food amounts to 3,500, of whom 2,500 are women. Of the 560 responsible positions at headquarters, 65, or 11 per cent., are filled by Civil Servants, and about 45 per cent. by business men.

Sixty of these business men receive no remuneration; they are voluntary. Eighty, or about 41 per cent. of the positions are filled by women, one of whom is a Civil Servant. The noble Viscount has just stated that he proposes to-morrow week to raise the whole question of the policy of food administration, and if there is any further information he requires on that occasion, with regard to the expenditure and the constitution of the staff, I shall be very happy to give it.

VISCOUNT CHAPLIN : I am greatly obliged to the noble Lord.

A PERSONAL EXPLANATION.

LORD BERESFORD : My Lords, on the Motion for the adjournment, I should like to make a personal explanation. On January 17 I made certain statements to

*Lord Rhondda.*

your Lordships about Mr. Laszlo, which were based on information that I regarded as authoritative and *bona fide*. Amongst those statements I said that Mr. Laszlo had been in communication with Count Luxburg. I now find that this statement is incorrect, and I beg to express regret that I made it. I think it is my bounden duty to do so, both with regard to Mr. Laszlo and your Lordships' House.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE.

THE EARL OF CRAWFORD : My Lords, I beg to move that the House do now adjourn, and I suggest that after our sitting to-morrow your Lordships should adjourn until Tuesday of next week.

House adjourned at fifteen minutes before seven o'clock.

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