

C-10-3 - L & P 1940-45
Cabinet Committees -
War Committee of the
Cabinet -- Law & Practice

War Committee -
its responsibilities
composition
efficient operation
security

FILE NO. C-10-3 I&P

1940-41-42-43-44-45

PRIVY COUNCIL OFFICE CANADA

SUBJECT

CABINET COMMITTEES

WAR COMMITTEE OF THE CABINET

Law and Practice

ATIP REVIEW SLIP / AIPRP BORDEREAU DE RÉVISION

RG #: 2 Vol.:
Acc.: 1992-93/029 Box/Boîte: 2
File/Dossier: C-10-3-L+P
ATIP's Request #: TR-1266
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Description of Item:

Cabinet War Committee - Constitution/
Note on Memorandum of Nov. 17,
regarding War Committee, by
J. R. Baldwin, Nov. 19th, 1942.

Exemption:

Privacy 3(g)

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1940-45

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C-10-3-L & P

Description of Item:

Cabinet War Committee-Constitution?

Memorandum Re: War Committee
of Canada, Nov. 17th, 1942, by
Charles Gavan Power.

(Discussion on Advantages &
Disadvantages, Proposed changes
in composition) of CWC)

Exemption: Privacy 3(g)

Mr. Robertson:

Heeney
brought this in.
He said that it is
"very secret" and
"very personal".
He wants you to
read it over the
week-end and return
it to him on Monday

C-10-3 LRP
P-23

MEMORANDUM

November 17th, 1942

Re: WAR COMMITTEE OF CANADA

The War Committee, as at present constituted, consists of the following personnel:

The Prime Minister
The Minister of Natural Resources
The Minister of Justice
The Minister of Transport
The Minister of Finance
The Minister of National Defence
The Minister of National Defence for Air
The Minister of National Defence for Naval Affairs.
The Minister of Munitions & Supply.

Advantages

1. The men who are administering the most important portfolios connected with the war have an opportunity of meeting fairly frequently.
2. The Prime Minister in the informal conversation which goes on around the table, probably more than in the discussion of the items on the agenda, gets some idea of the departmental problems which arise out of the war administration.
3. The Ministers are enabled to get a more comprehensive picture of the war generally through discussions of policies, reading of despatches, etc. than they would if they were confined to the routine administration of their own departments.
4. The war effort can be better co-ordinated and better team play can be developed.
5. It is essential that those entrusted with important war portfolios should be thoroughly familiar with the Government's war policy on any matter at any given moment and with the reasons for that policy.
6. On the whole, largely on account of the friendly personalities, there has been no friction.

Disadvantages

1. There are too many members.
2. War Committee meet too infrequently and the agenda is too long.
3. Too many matters of minor importance take up too much time.
4. Busy Ministers are taken away from their departmental work to discuss matters which should be settled by Treasury Board or within the departments themselves.

5. Ministers immersed in the interests of their own departments have little or no time to think through problems of general import, which do not directly effect their own administration.

6. When important matters of a general character do effect two or more departments, there is apt to be conflict of interest which will develop into a serious difference of opinion, in which case, as Colonel Ralston has so aptly put it, we are in the position of acting as advocates and, at one and the same time, of sitting as judges. That real trouble has not as yet developed arising out of these circumstances is due almost entirely to the fact that all of us are intimate personal friends and will go to any lengths to avoid giving offence one to the other....If we were strangers to one another and were representatives of or delegates of different interests, there would be the devil to pay. (By the way, this is the best argument I have yet found against National Union Government).

7. We have now reached a step, particularly in the manpower question, when divergent interests are bound to emerge; for instance, the Army as against other Services, the Services as against civilian employment in munitions, agriculture, lumbering, mining, etc. In other words, the Canadian manpower economy must be settled objectively and impartially.

8. The financial aspects of our national war effort must be also be considered objectively and impartially in the same way as the manpower aspect.

The factors mentioned in paragraphs 5, 6, 7 and 8 make it imperative that there be some change in the set-up of the War Committee.

Suggested Modifications

These are submitted with reserve because:

- (1) I am not quite sure that they will work.
- (2) I have not consulted my colleagues and they may take umbrage at my somewhat uncereemonious disposal of their aims, objects and ambitions.

The suggestions are--

1. Confine discussions in War Committee to matters of high Government policy or to matters of departmental policy involving

and have
a separate
committee
with
a separate
work

other departments.

2. Cut down the number of members. *no necessity*

3. Meeting more frequently and for shorter sessions, taking fewer questions at each session and giving to these more thorough exploration.

4. Some of the members of the Committee should be free from departmental duties and in an informal way be considered the representatives of other Ministers.

5. So far I have confined myself to principle--from now on I discuss personalities and appointments and therefore I look for trouble.

(a) I would drop from the Committee as full-time members:

no & (b) Howe, Crerar, Illsley, Power and Michard.

(b) I would keep on the Committee and relieve from departmental duties:

Ralston and MacDonald.

(c) War Committee would then be composed of:

X The Prime Minister, St. Laurent, MacDonald and Ralston as full-time members.

(d) St. Laurent would be a member and remain Minister of Justice because:

(i) His portfolio is not a particularly onerous one.

(ii) His legal and constitutional knowledge and experience are invaluable.

(iii) He represents the Province of Quebec.

✓ (e) Ralston would be considered to represent all the armed forces and bring forward any matter relating thereto. It would take less time for the Services Ministers to explain to him than to the War Committee and all would trust him to represent them fairly and conscientiously.

(f) MacDonald, having had a long and successful experience in general administration could give valuable counsel on all questions of general interest; besides, he could be looked upon as representing Munitions and Finance. Furthermore, the job he has at present is not commensurate in importance with his ability and capacity.

6. Howe, Illsley and Power would be part-time members to attend whenever they felt they had anything important to bring forward or whenever the full-time members required their presence for information.

7. In order that part-time members be kept up to date as to policy and decisions, the agenda as well as minutes of the Committee should be communicated to them.

8. New Ministers should be appointed to Army and Navy.

This set-up would require legislation, possibly under the Committee War Measures Act, insofar as MacDonald and Ralston were concerned. In order to give them ministerial status and compensation.

Personal

Howe is busy with his own departmental problems and I often feel that he thinks attendance at the War Committee is a waste of time.

Illsley might be glad to have someone who is more familiar with the needs of the armed forces examine carefully some of the demands made by the three Services and relieve him of the onus of constantly appearing to be a brake on the wheel of the War Departments' progress.

With regard to myself, I would be sorry to leave War Committee, but I feel that Air requires some re-vitalizing as it is running down a bit and I should take at least one more session of Parliament at its head...after that I could go anywhere.

The alternative of all this would be to retain the War Committee of Canada as it is but give to the Prime Minister, Illsley, Ralston, Howe and Power one or more under-secretary if they can arrange matters so as to give to these under-secretaries something to do.

If the suggestions I have made do not meet with approval, I am willing to try out the under-secretary idea.

It might be that we could follow Godbout's example and name, instead of under-secretaries, a number of Ministers-Without-Portfolio who gradually would be broken into administration duties.

Th. Power