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The Right Honourable Lord Hankey

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GOVERNMENT CONTROL IN WAR

By

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE

LORD HANKEY

G.C.B., G.C.M.G., G.C.V.O., F.R.S.

With a Foreword by

G. M. TREVELYAN

Master of Trinity College

LEES KNOWLES LECTURES, 1945

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FOREWORD

It is quite unnecessary that I, or anyone else, should write a Foreword to introduce a work by Lord Hankey on his own subject. But it is his special request that I should do so, and I am the Master of the College that provides the Lees Knowles Lectures.

I call it his own subject, because for nearly forty years he has taken a leading part in the rapid development of the various organs of our modern Government Control in War, and knows better than anyone the inside working of the machinery of War Cabinets, Imperial Conferences, Councils and Service Committees which has been created with such success to win both the last and the present war.

Starting life as a Marine officer, 'soldier and sailor too', he became Assistant Secretary of the Committee of Imperial Defence, 1908, Secretary of that body, 1912-38, Secretary of the War Cabinet and Imperial War Cabinet, 1916-19, Secretary of the Cabinet, 1919-38, Clerk of the Privy Council, 1923-38, Secretary of the Imperial Conference and of many International Conferences between the two wars, Minister without Portfolio in the War Cabinet, 1939-40, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, 1940-41, Paymaster General, 1941-42, Chairman of the Scientific Advisory Committee and Engineering Advisory Committee, 1942-43—and very much else besides! As the first Secretary that the Cabinet ever had, he has seen from inside the important constitutional development of that body from a meeting of the King's confidential servants without minutes or secretariat, into a fully equipped council of state. And if any single man knows the government machinery by which the wars of this country and empire are organised, it is the author of these lectures. This little book is, therefore, an important contribution to our constitutional history as well as to the history of the two world wars.

G. M. TREVELYAN

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INTRODUCTION

THE late Sir Lees Knowles, from whom these lectures take their name, was, like myself, an Old Rugbeian, and it was an especial pleasure for me to be the first lecturer to come from the same school as the founder.

It was also a privilege to deliver the lectures under the chairmanship of the Master of Trinity, who has made an inestimable contribution to our knowledge of history.

When first asked to choose a subject, my choice fell on 'Amphibious Warfare', in which, as a former officer of the Royal Marine Artillery, I had always taken a deep interest, and which has developed so remarkably during the present war. But here I found that my old friend Admiral of the Fleet Lord Keyes, who has much greater practical experience of the subject than I in this war and the last, had anticipated me in 1943.

I therefore fell back on a subject with which I have been identified since I became Assistant Secretary of the Committee of Imperial Defence in 1908 and Secretary in 1912.

The following chapters do not contain any sensational revelations. The facts are all to be found in published works. But they are widely scattered in official Blue Books, White Papers, Reports of Royal Commissions or Official Committees, Reports of debates in Parliament (Hansard), Official Histories, of which there must already be nearly fifty volumes, and, above all, in the Memoirs and personal diaries of the leading figures of the last war, at home and abroad. A list of the works actually consulted is given at the end of this book, but is only a fraction of the complete bibliography.

All that is attempted here is a brief synopsis of the development of Government Control from the establishment of the Committee of Imperial Defence at the beginning of the present century up to the date of the last lecture of the series (9th March 1945), to establish some basic principles, and to draw from the past some lessons for the future.

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In pursuance of this theme, Chapter I is of an introductory character, in which an attempt is made to formulate a series of fundamental principles on which Government Control in War should be based. In subsequent chapters these are tested by an examination of the development of Government Control over the preparations for the Great War 1914–18 (Chapter II); during that war (Chapter III); between the two wars (Chapter IV); and in the present war (Chapter V). In the penultimate Chapter VI certain criticisms of the present system are examined, and the last chapter contains a summary of the existing principles and practice in Government Control in War followed by some suggestions for the future.

The ‘Government Control’ with which these chapters deal is the higher control of all the forces of a State, an Empire or an Alliance in a major war; the combination for the prosecution of the war of all the resources, both military and civil, of the States concerned; the methods and machinery by which, in the light of modern experience, especially in this war and the last, they can best be focused on the main task of defeating the enemy; and more particularly the principles on which the system should be founded.

Those ‘controls’ of such matters as food, fuel, lighting, transport, etc., which some people find exasperating are not part of the subject. They are part of the contribution which we all make to the national war effort, and, in the aggregate, are of considerable importance, but they are not dealt with here.

It will be convenient to mention, in order to avoid misunderstanding, that when the word ‘military’ is used, it refers to all three Fighting Services—Navy, Army and Air Force.