CABINET.

Copy No. 9.

P.135 (32). CHILDREN AND YOUNG PERSONS BILL.

Memorandum by the Home Secretary.

I circulate, for consideration by the Cabinet, a memorandum by Mr. Oliver Stanley, who is in charge of the Children and Young Persons Bill, asking for instructions as to the line which he should take in dealing with an amendment to the Bill which has been put down by Lady Astor, and is supported by Members of all Parties, proposing that local authorities should be empowered to deal by means of by-laws with the conditions of employment of Young Persons between 14 and 18 in the so-called unregulated occupations.

H. S.

15. 4. 32.
CHILDREN AND YOUNG PERSONS BILL.

Memorandum by Mr. Stanley.

The Secretary of State will remember that the draft of the Children Bill, as originally submitted to the Cabinet for approval, contained proposals which would have enabled local authorities to deal by means of by-laws with the conditions of employment of young persons between 14-18 in the so-called unregulated employments.

The refusal of the Cabinet to authorise these proposals was, as I understand it, due to two reasons.

(1) The fear, expressed by the Chief Whip, that they would arouse great opposition among Government supporters in the House of Commons.

(2) The view of the Minister of Labour that these restrictions would be regarded as oppressive by employers, while industry was in its present critical condition.

The objection of the Cabinet was not therefore to the principle of these proposals, to which in fact successive Governments have given their approval, but to the time of their introduction.

The proposals were in accordance with the Cabinet decision deleted from the Bill and I was instructed to oppose on behalf of the Government any attempt to insert them in the Bill during its parliamentary stages.

A curious and somewhat difficult situation has now arisen in Committee. A new Clause has been put down in the name of Lady Astor, supported by Members of all Parties, which would have the effect of restoring these proposals.

I have made discreet inquiries among the members of the Committee and this new Clause appears to command a volume of support which makes its passage not only possible but even probable, even though the Government Whips are put on against
it, as for reasons which I need not particularise, the crack of the Government Whip has temporarily lost some of its effect.

Two courses appear to me to be open, and I should like the Secretary of State's instructions.

(1) I could oppose the new Clause "sans phrase", make full use of the pressure of the Whips, and, if as seem probable I am defeated in Committee, trust to the greater strength of the machine on the floor of the House to delete the offending Clause on Report Stage. This course, whether it ended in victory, or, as it might still do, in defeat, would have the unfortunate effect of giving publicity to differences of opinion between the Government and a considerable body of its own supporters under circumstances where the sympathy of the general public was with the supporters. And, if finally the Government was forced to accept this Clause, it would incur the hostility of the employers without receiving any credit from the supporters of the proposals.

(2) I could oppose the inclusion of the proposals in this Bill and at this time, but give on behalf of the Government an assurance of sympathy with the principle and sincere intention to proceed with the proposals as soon as opportunity offered. To be successful I should probably have to go as far as pledging the Government to the introduction of a measure as soon as the industrial situation improved. It will be remembered that before the crisis such a pledge had been given on behalf of both the Conservative and Labour Parties.

I should not use such authority, unless I was satisfied it would be effective, but, if I do use it, I should like to have an assurance that the pledge would in fact be implemented at the earliest possible moment.

O. F. S.