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C A B I N E T.

COMMITTEE ON THE ORGANISATION OF THE COAL-MINING INDUSTRY.

THE COAL MINES BILL, 1936.

REPORT.

1. At their Meeting on 20th May, 1936, (Cabinet 38 (36) Conclusion 1) the Cabinet had under consideration, as a matter of urgency, the present position in regard to the Coal Mines Bill, and agreed that the Bill should be referred to the Committee for examination of the whole situation, particularly in its political aspects, in consultation with the Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasury, with a view to a report to the Cabinet.

2. In the course of his speech in the House of Commons on the Second Reading of the Bill on 18th May, the Prime Minister said:-

"Clearly, it would be impossible to get the Second Reading of this Bill tonight. I am also clear that it would only be fair, in all the circumstances, that before the House is asked to vote on the Second Reading of the Bill we should have another day's Debate, that a reasonable time should elapse before the day for that Debate is selected and that before that day comes the Government should issue a White Paper explanatory of the suggested modifications to be introduced in Committee by the President of the Board of Trade and the Secretary for Mines in the event of the Bill receiving a Second Reading."

Hansard, Vol. 312, No. 88,
Col. 912.

3. We have accordingly considered what date should be fixed for the resumption of the adjourned Debate on the Second Reading.
4. We are informed by the Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasury that on the assumption that Parliament will be prorogued for the Summer Recess on Friday, 31st July, the House of Commons Time Table is already overloaded to the extent of five days, on the most favourable estimate. He anticipates that if an attempt is made to proceed with the Bill it will meet with the most strenuous opposition, both on the floor of the House and in Standing Committee. In his view the Committee stage of the Bill would be unlikely to be concluded much before the end of July and he can see no prospect of the Bill passing into law before the Recess.
5. The Lord Chancellor has warned us that there will be at least as much opposition to the Bill in the House of Lords as in the House of Commons. The House of Lords would certainly refuse to pass the Bill if it only reached them a few days before the Recess.
6. We have examined the possibility of dividing the Bill and of proceeding before the Recess only with the extension of Part I of the Act of 1930. We are satisfied, however, that the objections to this course outweigh any possible advantages.
7. In these circumstances we are convinced that no useful purpose would be served by any attempt to proceed with the Bill before the Summer Recess.
8. The Bill, duly amended on the lines indicated by the President of the Board of Trade in the Debate on Second Reading, should therefore be re-introduced in the autumn,

and its passage into law should then be made a question of confidence. It will be imperative, before the Second Reading of the new Bill in the autumn, that every effort should be made to ensure adequate publicity and support for the Government's proposals, both inside and outside Parliament.

9. In view of the Debate on 18th May, it is urgently necessary that the Government's intentions regarding the Bill should be announced before the Whitsuntide Recess, and we attach, for the approval of the Cabinet, the draft of a statement on the subject which might be incorporated in the Prime Minister's announcement regarding Parliamentary business after Whitsuntide.

10. If the Cabinet accept our suggestions there will, of course, be no necessity for the publication of a White Paper.

11. Our conclusions and recommendations may be summarised as follows :-

- (1) No useful purpose would be served by any attempt to proceed with the present Coal Mines Bill before the Summer Recess.
- (2) A Coal Mines Bill, embodying the modifications indicated by the President of the Board of Trade in the Debate on Second Reading, should be introduced in the autumn and its passage into law should then be made a matter of confidence.
- (3) A statement of the Government's intentions on the lines of the attached draft should be made in the House of Commons before the Whitsuntide Recess.

Signed on behalf of the Committee

WALTER RUNCIMAN,

Chairman.

Board of Trade,

26th May, 1936.

DRAFT STATEMENT.

It will be for the convenience of the House if I make a statement as to the Government's intentions in regard to the Coal Mines Bill.

The Government hold by the principles of the Bill, which forms an integral part of the measures designed to improve the condition of the coal industry; they have, however, decided that it must be postponed until the Autumn. When the House reassembles after Whitsuntide there will only be about 8 Parliamentary weeks before the beginning of August. There is still a great deal of essential Government business to be got through before the Recess and from a careful examination of the time-table, it is clear that sufficient time is not now available to pass the Bill through all its stages in this House in time to allow reasonable discussion of the measure in another place.

The Government will make use of the interval to prepare a Bill, which will incorporate the changes announced by the President of the Board of Trade when moving the Second Reading on Monday, 18th May. Consequently it will not be necessary to present a White Paper.

The Government will ask the House to proceed with the new Bill as soon as possible after the Summer Recess.

If any inconvenience or uncertainty is likely to be created by this brief postponement, I trust that the terms of my announcement will be sufficient to dissipate them.