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W.P. (41) 56.

THE Prime Minister has instructed me to ask that the attached paper shall be returned to the Offices of the War Cabinet immediately after perusal.

E. E. BRIDGES.

March 12, 1941.

Printed for the War Cabinet. March 1941.

SECRET.

Copy No. 16

W.P. (41) 56.

March 11, 1941.

TO BE KEPT UNDER LOCK AND KEY.

It is requested that special care may be taken to ensure the secrecy of this document.

WAR CABINET.

EXPANSION OF THE ROYAL AIR FORCE.

Memorandum by the Minister of Aircraft Production.

THE Secretary of State for Air's paper on the Expansion of the Royal Air Force (W.P. (41) 18) expresses some anxiety about the advanced trainer position.

But we do not think that the Air Ministry are short of these aircraft so far. If a deficiency exists or is threatened, we will do what we can to scrape some together.

The Air Ministry have sent abroad 1,787 aircraft of advanced trainer type since the 11th May, 1940.

The prospect of an acceleration in the despatch overseas of training aircraft was the occasion of a reasoned protest from the Ministry of Aircraft Production on the 20th August, 1940. Implicit in this document was a warning of the shortage now feared by the Air Ministry.

The advanced trainer position has since then been embarrassed still further by the bombing of Coventry, with its damage to Cheetah engine production.

As a direct consequence of this disaster, we have on our hands more than one hundred Oxfords which we are unable to engine.

Yet during the same period the Air Ministry have been sending Cheetahs out of the country. Of this we make no complaint now. But these explanations are needed to complete the picture provided in the Secretary of State's paper.

He speaks of the prospect of a large surplus in "defensive elements," that is to say in fighters, and of a shortage in bombers.

But the balance of the programme as between fighters and bombers depends on what we can get and not on what we would like to get. Plants engaged on the production of fighters cannot be swiftly turned over to the manufacture of bombers.

The surplus of fighters is not large. 582 Hurricanes and Spitfires ready in A.S.U.'s, including "at 4 days."

Up to the present there is no shortage in heavy bombers. We are doing everything possible to forward the production of these aircraft. We have high hopes of the new types. And there is a confident expectation that, given a little time and freedom, we shall be able to arrange for the production of Halifax on a great scale.

There are 320 bombers ready in the A.S.U.'s. These figures indicate that so far we have been able to keep abreast of the demands made on us, and even to keep somewhat ahead of them.

All this time the demand on us for spares has been tremendous. Also shipments abroad have troubled us greatly. Since the 11th May 3,234 aircraft have been shipped abroad. With them have gone 4,714 engines.

B.

*Ministry of Aircraft Production,
March 11, 1941.*

