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WAR CABINET.

MAN-POWER FOR THE COAL-MINING INDUSTRY.

MEMORANDUM BY THE LORD PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL.

1. If we are to secure our essential requirements of coal, it is urgently necessary that the labour force in the coal-mining industry should be raised to 720,000 and maintained at that level.

The Lord President's Committee approved in August plans for increasing the labour force of the industry by voluntary means; but it was then contemplated that, if these failed to achieve their purpose, compulsory methods would have to be applied. The campaign for volunteers has been given a fair trial, and it is now clear that it will not yield sufficient results.

The Minister of Labour and National Service is satisfied that the numbers required cannot be obtained except by calling-up compulsorily to the coal mines fit men of military age who would otherwise be called up for the Armed Forces; and the Minister of Fuel and Power made an announcement to this effect in the House of Commons on the 12th October (Official Report, column 765).

2. The main difficulty in applying compulsion is that it must be selective. Only a small proportion of those due to be called up for military service need be drafted into the mines; and the basis of selecting these must be such as to win public confidence in its impartiality. The Minister of Labour and National Service, after considering all possible alternatives, has come to the conclusion that the selection must be made by ballot.

3. It is therefore proposed that the numbers required for the coal mines should be selected by ballot from among men between the ages of 18 and 25 who are available for calling up to the Armed Forces and are placed in a medical grade acceptable for underground coal-mining. The field of selection ought, on grounds of fairness, to be as wide as possible; and it is therefore proposed to exclude from the ballot only men who have been accepted for flying duties in the R.A.F. and the Fleet Air Arm, or as artificers in submarines, and men in a short list of highly skilled occupations who are only allowed to enter certain Service trades and, under existing arrangements, are not allowed to volunteer for coal-mining. It is not considered possible to exclude from the ballot men who have been members of the Senior and Junior Training Corps, Army Cadets, Sea Cadets, Air Training Corps or Home Guard.

All the men from whom this selection is made will already have been medically examined and placed in a high medical grade. There may, however, be rare cases of men within those medical grades who, for special reasons, are unsuitable for underground work; and arrangements will be made for a second medical examination of any who, on being selected for coal-mining, claim to be suffering from some special disability which unfits them for this kind of work.

4. It is likely that some men who were content to be called up for military service will seek to show reasons, other than medical reasons, why they should not be drafted into coal-mining. If the impartiality of the scheme is to be maintained, it will be necessary to reject automatically claims by employers that a man is indispensable in the industry in which he is already at work, and claims that a man has special talents for the Armed Forces which would be wasted in the coal mines. It will, however, be necessary to provide for appeal in cases of special hardship—so that, for example, a man who is suddenly faced with

serious domestic difficulties can apply for a certificate of postponement. In such cases, men selected for coal-mining will therefore be given an opportunity of appealing to a Local Appeal Board, who will be empowered to make recommendations on the two questions :—

- (a) Whether, since the proper time for making a hardship claim, any new circumstances have arisen constituting hardship justifying postponement; and
- (b) Whether there are special circumstances which make employment in coal-mining an exceptional hardship.

The standards applied by these Boards will be comparable to those applied in granting postponement of military service.

5. The men selected by these means will be directed, in the first instance, to a course of four weeks' training at a training centre established or approved by the Ministry of Labour and National Service. Men living in or near a coalfield will, as far as possible, be trained for employment in that coalfield; others will be trained for employment in the area where their services are most required. Individual preferences will be taken into account as far as possible. This preliminary course of training will be supplemented by further training at the collieries at which the men are placed for employment.

6. The Lord President's Committee have endorsed the proposals of the Minister of Labour and National Service, which are outlined above; and they invite the War Cabinet to give early approval to the scheme so that it can be put into operation in December.

C. R. A.

*Privy Council Office, S.W. 1,
23rd November, 1943.*
