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13th January, 1941.

WAR CABINET.

Copy No. 58

ITALIAN PRISONERS OF WAR FOR LAND RECLAMATION WORK.

Memorandum by the Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries.

1. In many counties men are required to work in gangs on urgent drainage, ditching and reclamation work.

2. I have suggested to the Secretary of State for War that 2,000 to 3,000 North Italian peasants from among the prisoners of war taken in Libya should be brought to this country at once to be formed into gangs to work under County Agricultural Executive Committees. The Secretary of State for War agrees to this course provided that the prisoners are carefully selected so that they would not include any violent or Fascist types. He feels, however, that the question of policy of bringing Italian prisoners to the United Kingdom should be brought up for Cabinet decision.

3. The Ministry of Shipping can provide the necessary shipping, but have raised the question of escort, which is one for the Admiralty. The Admiralty say they could not guarantee that an escort would be available, but do not consider special protection to be necessary.

4. If the prisoners can be made available, the Minister of Labour has no objection to the proposal provided that the Italian prisoners work in gangs under the County Committees.

5. I ask therefore that the Cabinet should authorise the Secretary of State for War to arrange for 2,000 to 3,000 suitable North Italian prisoners to be brought immediately to this country.

(Itld.) R.S.H.

Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries

13th January, 1941.

