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S E C R E T.

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16th September, 1941.

W A R C A B I N E T.

MAN-POWER IN THE COAL MINING INDUSTRY.

Memorandum by the Lord President of the Council.

1. To obtain the output of coal required to meet the needs of war-time consumption, it is necessary that the labour force in the coal-mining industry shall be raised to 720,000 and maintained at that level.

In recent weeks special steps have been taken by the Ministry of Labour to secure the return to the mines of men who drifted away into other industries after the loss of the coal export trade last year, following the collapse of France. Extensive use has been made of the power to direct men to return to the mining industry.

As a result, 18,459 miners had returned to the pits up to the 15th September; but this number must be raised to 30,000 in order to bring the total labour force up to the required figure of 720,000.

2. By continuing the measures already applied, the Minister of Labour expects to bring the figure up to 25,000 by the end of September. This will leave a deficit of 5,000, which ought to be made good by the middle of October. The Minister of Labour cannot give any assurance that he will be able to find this number of men within that time, unless he is given a fuller discretion to draw on some of the ex-miners who are now employed on unskilled or semi-skilled work in industries engaged on war production.

When the scheme was first launched for registering ex-miners with a view to their return to the pits, the Production Executive excluded certain vital undertakings and occupations from recruitment and certain others have since been added to the list of exclusions. Subsequently it was found that in Lancashire, Yorkshire and the Midlands these exemptions covered a high proportion of the limited numbers of men available, and the Coal Production Council accordingly asked that in these areas the Ministry of Labour should have discretion to withdraw semi-skilled and unskilled men. This was approved by the Production Executive with the reservation that men were not to be withdrawn from the Royal Ordnance Factories except after consultation with the Ministry of Supply followed by arrangements for replacement. A similar reservation was subsequently agreed by Ministers in respect of drop-forgings, non-ferrous metal industries and the manufacture of tank tracks. The Production Executive agreed, further, to give the Supply Departments the right of appeal against the withdrawal of skilled men from the general field of munitions production.

3. After a thorough review of the situation, the Lord President's Committee have come to the conclusion that it is absolutely essential that these additional 5,000 men should return to the mines as soon as possible, and in any case not later than the middle of October. They have considered whether the numbers required could not be made up by the withdrawal of men from the Army; but in their view it would be a mistake to reverse, at this stage, the policy hitherto adopted of finding the additional men required from other industries. It follows, however, that to obtain the full numbers required it will be necessary to draw further on the munitions industries and to limit very considerably the concession recently



made in deference to the views of the Supply Departments. This will involve inconvenience, and possibly loss of production, in those industries; but the Committee consider that, as coal is the key to all industries, this price must be paid in order to ensure a sufficient output of coal.

4. It is not proposed that ex-miners who are now fully skilled men in the excluded industries should be withdrawn unless the Supply Department concerned has agreed and arrangements have been made for replacement. On the other hand, it is suggested that men now engaged in unskilled or semi-skilled work in any of the excluded industries, no matter in what mining area they were previously employed, should be available for immediate withdrawal without consultation. This would apply only to men who had worked underground and the Minister of Labour and National Service would undertake to do his utmost to replace such men as quickly as possible, and, where considerable numbers of ex-miners are employed in one establishment, would withdraw them gradually so as to avoid dislocation of production.

It is also suggested that the right of appeal against the withdrawal of skilled men from the general field of munitions production (referred to at the end of paragraph 2 above) should be exercised only in extreme cases.

These proposals would give the Minister of Labour and National Service a greater discretion than he has at present in order to obtain the full quota of men needed in each mining district. As Chairman of the Production Executive he is in a position to balance the needs of the various industries concerned, including those of the coal mining industry; and the Committee recommend that he should be given full discretion to obtain the numbers of miners required, but that, subject to the overruling necessity of obtaining those numbers, he should cause the least possible interference with the needs of war production.

J.A.

GREAT GEORGE STREET, S.W.1.

16th September, 1941.

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