

The Official History of

# THE MINISTRY OF MUNITIONS



VOLUME IV  
THE SUPPLY AND CONTROL  
OF LABOUR 1915-16



Naval & Military Press in association with The Imperial War Museum

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# HISTORY OF THE MINISTRY OF MUNITIONS

VOLUME IV

## THE SUPPLY AND CONTROL OF LABOUR 1915-16

Part I Labour Supply, July-December, 1915

Part II Labour Regulation and the Munitions of War  
(Amendment) Act 1916

Part III The Limitation of Recruiting

Part IV The Progress of Dilution

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HISTORY OF THE MINISTRY OF MUNITIONS

VOLUME IV

THE SUPPLY AND CONTROL OF LABOUR

1915-1916

PART I

LABOUR SUPPLY

JULY-DECEMBER, 1915



VOLUME IV.

THE SUPPLY AND CONTROL OF LABOUR,  
1915 to 1916.

PART I.

LABOUR SUPPLY,  
JULY. TO DECEMBER, 1915.

## CHAPTER I.

### WAR MUNITION VOLUNTEERS.

#### I. The Problem of Labour Supply.

At midsummer, 1915, the cardinal fact for the Labour Department of the Ministry of Munitions was the acute shortage of skilled labour. Of the million and a half males employed at the outbreak of war in the metal and chemical industries essential for the production of munitions and armaments nearly one-fifth had joined H.M. Forces as reservists or recruits. Indeed in those very industries voluntary enlistment had been most active. Although these losses were to some extent compensated by the attraction of new hands, the skilled men could not be replaced. But mechanical skill was never more needed. The manufacture and erection of new machinery, the adaptation of old, the making of tools, jigs and gauges, and the setting up of complex automatics, in order to ensure the precision required of all munitions of war, called in the first year of the Ministry for ingenuity, experience, high accuracy, in a word skill, with an urgency without parallel either before or since.

The most hopeful method of meeting this demand, as Sir H. Llewellyn Smith wrote<sup>1</sup> on 9 June, lay in the relaxation of such Trade Union rules, customs and practices as prevented the economical reorganisation of the workshop, the concentration of the skilled man on work which he alone could perform, and the devolution of all else on other labour, male or female, according to its ability. By the Treasury Agreement of 19 March, 1915, the Trade Union leaders had agreed to recommend the relaxation of such restrictions to their members. But little had been effected. The rank and file were not convinced that the needs of the country could not be met in other ways less threatening to the citadel of their craft. They suspected, not without some justification, that if they once surrendered their rules and customs these could never be restored. Their motive was not mere selfishness but the honest fear that the intrusion of large numbers of unskilled operatives would ultimately cause wide-spread unemployment and a general debasement of the standard of living. They accordingly pressed for the recall from the Colours of the skilled men who had joined the Forces and for the transfer from commercial to Government work of those who had not enlisted. These men (they believed) reinforced by Belgian refugees and workmen from Canada and the other Dominions would satisfy the national demand without imperilling the birthright they had inherited as Trade Unionists and skilled mechanics.

The Government consented to try the policy urged by the Trade Unions first, holding Dilution in reserve and, if that should not be accepted, Industrial Conscription. In the following narrative an attempt will be made to show why the efforts of the Ministry to transfer

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<sup>1</sup> M.W. 4591/2.

skilled men from commercial to munitions work and to obtain their release from the Colours failed to provide the labour required, and how this failure resulted in the co-operation of the Trade Unions in formulating the policy of Dilution and at the same time safeguarding the position of the skilled man.

## II. The Origin of the War Munition Volunteer Scheme.

On 8 June, 1915, Mr. Lloyd George met the National Advisory Committee<sup>1</sup> and laid before them the grave and menacing situation which confronted the British Army in Flanders owing to the shortage of munitions, especially shells and fuzes. He urged the necessity of bringing home to the skilled and organised workmen not only the extreme gravity and danger of the moment but also the supreme urgency for action. The entire organising capacity of the Nation must in some way or other be concentrated on supplying the deficiency with all possible speed. If voluntary effort should fail, compulsion was inevitable. It was therefore decided that the Minister should summon representatives of the Trades which had taken part in the Treasury Conference in March in order to arrange such a re-organisation of labour as would ensure the maximum output of munitions of war.<sup>2</sup>

The National Advisory Committee devoted the following day to the preparation of a scheme. They asked that the voluntary transfer of workmen from one shop or locality to another should be given a full trial before resorting to compulsion in any form, since that would be so disturbing as to defeat the end in view. Their proposal was a national expansion of the King's Squad, the members of which volunteered to go wherever they were required for three months, provided that their rate of wages was maintained and they received travelling or subsistence allowances, if they were moved away from their homes. This experiment had achieved no small success.<sup>3</sup> Launched on 15 May by the North-East Coast Armaments Committee, the King's Squad numbered over 5,200 men, of whom more than 1,300 had already been accepted by the employers to whom they were offered for transfer. Moreover the cost of moving the men from commercial to Government work did not exceed 1s. 8d. a man, while the weekly allowances paid for lodging money, travelling time and daily fares averaged no more than 7s. 1d. If the rest of the country should respond as readily to the call for Volunteers (and no industrial area was more heavily engaged on armament work than the North East Coast), Mr. Lloyd George would have a great army of skilled men, ready to go anywhere, at his command.

<sup>1</sup> A Committee, representative of the organised workers engaged in production for Government requirements, appointed by the Government to facilitate the carrying out of the Treasury Agreement and for consultation by the Government or by the workmen concerned. See Vol. I., Part II., Chap. IV.

<sup>2</sup> A full account of the steps by which this scheme was evolved out of the King's Squad raised by the North East Coast Armaments Committee, and of the negotiations between the Minister and the Trade Unions by which it was adopted as an alternative to Industrial Conscription, will be found in Vol. I., Part IV., Sections V. and VI.

<sup>3</sup> See Vol. I., Part III., Chap. III., Sect. III., and Appendix XIV., for the history of the King's Squad.

The National Advisory Committee therefore proposed an extension of this scheme throughout the Country. Only skilled workmen in employment, but not engaged on Government work, should be invited to enrol. The Volunteers should be transferred to firms under the control of the Government whose profits were restricted. When transferred they should receive the same subsistence and travelling allowances under the same conditions as the Government had approved for the members of the King's Squad. Representatives of the Trade Unions should report to the Local Munitions Committee on the fitness of the workmen for the work required; and this Committee would select for transfer and allocate the Volunteers, deciding their rates of wages and allowances and dealing with those who failed to observe the conditions of enrolment. Seven days should be allowed after the invitation to enrol in order to give the workmen an opportunity of averting Industrial Conscription.

Mr. Lloyd George accepted this scheme in principle at his conferences with the Trade Unions on 10 and 16 June. At the second conference, after giving a brief summary of the main provisions of the Munitions of War Bill, he said<sup>1</sup> :—

“ Now I will come at once to the point which we want you to undertake, and that is the enrolling of a body of volunteers who will undertake to proceed at once, upon a trade union requisition<sup>2</sup>, to any works where their services are required, for the purpose of expediting or increasing the output of war material. It is proposed that you should undertake the enrolling of these volunteers. They need not necessarily all be trade unionists. If there are men who are not trade unionists who would like to join the Army which you enrol, very well—you had better take them on. But the requisition will be served through you. If either the employer or the workman refuses to carry out his contract, proceedings will be taken by the Government, because we do not want to put the local trade union secretary in an invidious position of having to take proceedings either against the employer or against the workman who has undertaken during the next six months to go anywhere he is required for Government work and fails to do so for one reason or another.

“ Now will you kindly look at the undertaking which each volunteer will sign, because I want this undertaking at once. We propose to place at your disposal the whole of the machinery

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<sup>1</sup> HIST. REC./R/300/5.

<sup>2</sup> The original scheme threw upon the Trade Unions the responsibility of finding the men required by the Ministry, e.g., 75 millwrights to set up machinery at the Birmingham Small Arms Factory (to quote an example given by Mr. Lloyd George). If this plan had been carried out, the Ministry's duty would have been limited to formulating demands, compelling if necessary recalcitrant employers to let their men go, and taking precautions against the withdrawal of men from munitions work or other urgent work of national importance. This last duty would of course have involved considerable complexities and difficulties of administration.

of the Government to assist you in enrolling your volunteers. If you would prefer doing it yourselves that is a matter for you ; but we were asked to assist you in order to save time in sending out circulars, doing the printing, and all that class of work. You have a copy before you of the Schedule, as it is called. There is the name of the Volunteer, his address, his occupation, his trade society and branch, his present employer and place of employment, the nature of the work in which he is engaged and the wages which he is getting. Wherever he goes he will go under Trade Union regulations, Trade Union wages, and Trade Union conditions, but we want to know what wages he is earning at the present moment. This is the undertaking he gives :—

“ ‘ In accordance with arrangements which have been made with the Minister of Munitions by the National Advisory Committee, acting on behalf of the Trade Unions, I undertake with the Minister of Munitions to accept employment on making munitions of war in such controlled establishments as may be named by him, and to remain in such employment during the war for so long as required (not exceeding six months in all) subject to the conditions set out on this form.’ ”

Mr. Lloyd George then went through the conditions<sup>1</sup> :—

- “ 1. The rate of wages paid will be that of the district to which the workman is transferred, provided that if in any case the workman proves that this is less than the rate he was receiving before enrolment, he shall be entitled to receive such higher rate.
- “ 2. The workman will receive over and above his wages the following allowances :—
  - (a) If brought from a distance beyond that which he can reasonably travel daily, railway fare at the commencement and completion of the work for which transferred ; and, where necessary, subsistence allowance at the rate of 2s. 6d. per day for seven days per week. It is clearly understood that the subsistence allowance is not intended to enable any workman to make a pecuniary profit.
  - (b) If within daily travelling distance (exceeding half an hour each way) the value of workman's tickets and one hour's travelling time per day at the rate of time and a half.
  - (c) If within daily travelling distance (not exceeding half an hour) the cost of workman's tickets.

Subsistence and travelling allowances will be paid by the firm employing the workman, with the wages.

<sup>1</sup> The conditions are here reproduced in their final form, and differ in several details from what Mr. Lloyd George said. The main difference was the restriction of subsistence allowance (paragraph 2 (a) ) to a man who “ required to keep up two homes.” Exception was taken to this condition by the Conference on the motion of the North East Coast representatives. Otherwise the scheme was accepted without criticism. See Appendix I., *Form of Enrolment*.

- “ 3. The workman may volunteer for a further period of employment after the completion of the period for which he is required in the first instance.
- “ 4. Any workman transferred from employment under this undertaking shall, if found suitable, be guaranteed employment during the war for a period not exceeding six months.

I agree that any breach of this undertaking may be dealt with by a Munitions Court, consisting of a Chairman appointed by the Minister of Munitions, with Assessors equally representing employers and workmen, which may, if it thinks fit, impose a fine not exceeding £3.”

Later, in the course of discussion, Mr. Lloyd George said of the scheme :—

“ This is purely an attempt to avoid compulsion. It is an experiment. . . . which, if it fails, will bring us face to face with compulsion. I think it would be a very good thing if the workmen knew that. I think it would help to bring them in as volunteers. I should have thought it was a very desirable thing to let them know that this is a step to avoid compulsion. (Hear, hear). If we cannot get workmen either because employers are using the means suggested by Mr. Hebron<sup>1</sup>—and I am sorry to say I have some evidence of that kind—or for other reasons, then there is only one way of doing it, and that is by laying it down as a principle that every man during the War must render the service the State thinks he can render. But we will try this experiment first.”

The representatives of the Trade Unions approved the scheme outlined by the Minister and agreed that he should arrange in co-operation with the Trade Unions to set up Munitions Work Bureaux for the enrolment of skilled men not employed on Government work and belonging to the trades essential for the production of munitions.

### III. The Enrolment of the War Munion Volunteers.

To organise the work of enrolment, Mr. C. F. Rey, General Manager of Labour Exchanges, was appointed on 18 June an officer of the Ministry of Munitions, and at the same time retained his post at the Board of Trade. The title first suggested for him was Director of Industrial Recruiting<sup>2</sup>; but on 21 June it was settled that he should be known as the Director of Munion Workers' Enrolment; about the middle of July his title was again altered to that of Director of Labour Supply. These changes of title reflect the transition in the Ministry's policy from a military organisation of mobile companies of munion workers to a comprehensive scheme for the supply of

<sup>1</sup> *i.e.*, dismissing men who enrolled and informing men who wished to enrol that they were engaged on Government work when they were not so engaged.

<sup>2</sup> M.W. 6777.

labour, including dilution and training as well as transfer and release from the Colours. And the dual position held by Mr. Rey facilitated the co-ordination of the Labour department of the Ministry with the Labour Exchanges, which alone possessed the local and technical knowledge necessary for the work which the Ministry was called upon to undertake.

The Trade Unions, however, were apprehensive lest an open association of the Labour Exchanges with the work of enrolment should prejudice the success of their scheme. The skilled men, it was thought, in many parts of the country would refuse to attend the Exchanges, which were connected in their minds with unemployment and unskilled labour. Indeed the scheme, as proposed by the National Advisory Committee and adopted by Mr. Lloyd George, left the responsibility both for enrolment and for transfer to the Trade Unions. But it was soon recognised that they had neither the staff nor the administrative machinery necessary to carry through work which required experience of registration and an established routine to ensure accuracy and uniformity.

Accordingly, the Mayors and Provosts of the principal cities and towns were invited to allow the opening of Munitions Work Bureaux in their Town Halls, the Managers of the Labour Exchanges were instructed to make the necessary arrangements for the registration of those who offered to enrol, and the National Advisory Committee undertook to secure that the local trade union officials should canvass those of their members who were not employed on Government work and attend at the Bureaux to advise on their qualifications. Where no municipal offices were available it was arranged that applications should be received at the Labour Exchanges, which for that purpose would remain open from 6 to 9 in the evening as Munitions Work Bureaux.<sup>1</sup>

On 24 June, enrolment began. Munitions Work Bureaux were opened at 200 Town Halls and 200 Labour Exchanges. On the night before Mr. Lloyd George had introduced the Munitions of War Bill, and repeated that compulsion would be inevitable unless an adequate supply of labour for the turning out of munitions were obtained. His warning was reinforced by a wide and costly campaign of advertisement in the Press and by posters and handbills.<sup>2</sup> At the same time members of the National Advisory Committee and other trade union leaders addressed meetings in various parts of the country, explaining the details of the scheme, assuring the workmen that due regard would be paid to their interests and convenience, and appealing to them to show the same devotion and loyalty as their fellows were showing in the trenches of Flanders.

The period for enrolment was extended beyond the seven days at first contemplated, to 4 July, and again to 10 July, when about 91,000 men had enrolled. After 10 July the Bureaux were closed and adver-

<sup>1</sup> L.E. 16325.

<sup>2</sup> The total cost of advertising was £30,094 12s. 1d. *Weekly Report*, 14 Oct., 1914.

tisement was discontinued ; but enrolment still went on at the Labour Exchanges, some 11,000 men enrolling there in the course of the next two months. The final classification was as follows :—

Platers, Riveters	Drillers, Shipwrights	..	..	..	23,564
Toolmakers, Toolroom Workers and Gauge Makers		..	..	..	1,834
Toolsetters	..	..	..	..	193
Millwrights	..	..	..	..	1,727
Turners	..	..	..	..	7,971
Fitters	..	..	..	..	24,830
Capstan and Turret Lathe Operators		..	..	..	830
Skilled Metal Machinists	..	..	..	..	6,710
Other Metal Machinists	..	..	..	..	1,884
Workers in Brass and Other Metals	..	..	..	..	4,667
Lead Burners	..	..	..	..	256
Coppersmiths	..	..	..	..	395
Miscellaneous, Unanalysed	..	..	..	..	27,166
					<hr/> 102,027

#### IV. Adjudication on Employers' Protests.

The enrolment figures looked promising ; but it soon became apparent that a large proportion of the Volunteers could not be transferred. When a Volunteer enrolled a form was sent to his employer, in order to afford an opportunity of stating the reason why the man should not be transferred to other employment. Three days were allowed for returning this form to the Bureaux. The enrolment form along with any protest sent in was then despatched to the Mmunition Workers' Enrolment Department of the Ministry, except from the districts covered by the North East Coast and the Glasgow and West of Scotland Armaments Committees, which were entrusted with the duty of investigating the protests and transferring the men enrolled in those parts ; for they were at that time the only local organisations with the staff and experience necessary for such work.

The officer in charge of the Bureau was instructed to forward along with the employer's protest his observations concerning the reasonableness and accuracy of the statements made.<sup>1</sup> It was hoped that this information, after consultation if necessary with the Department of Munitions Supply, would render a decision possible on the transfer of the Volunteer. ..But it was recognised that in many cases an inspector's report would be required. The Home Secretary therefore was asked on 25 June whether the Factory Inspectors could be placed at the disposal of the Ministry for this purpose. This request was granted. On 3 July, after the areas to be covered by the Home Office Inspectors had been settled, instructions<sup>2</sup> were sent to the Divisional Officers of Labour Exchanges asking them to select inspectors to cover the rest of the country. Requests for investigation should be treated as urgent, and the report should be forwarded within three days of receiving the request. A month later the Labour Officers of the Ministry were appointed, but they took little part in this work of enquiry.

<sup>1</sup> M W. 11532.

<sup>2</sup> C.O. Circ. 1893.

When the enrolment forms reached the Ministry, they were given out to a private firm to be indexed on cards. But when this index was tested it proved so inaccurate, that it was necessary to do the work again. No action could be taken on the protests until the Volunteers had been classified under firms and under trades. This preliminary task was not completed until 21 July.<sup>1</sup>

In the meantime a Committee had been appointed to advise on the transfer of Munition Volunteers.<sup>2</sup> This Committee of Advisers (as it was first called) consisted of a number of business men of varied experience and high standing, who had offered their services to the Ministry. It was appointed primarily to act as a buffer between the Labour Department and the opposition which was anticipated in Parliament and elsewhere as soon as the transfer of Munition Volunteers should be attempted on a large scale. The Committee was intended to lay down the principles on which the adjudication of protests should proceed, the application of these principles being left to officers of the Ministry called Assessors. But this plan did not work. Protests were made in respect of 66,000 of the Volunteers; and many of these involved special and complex questions which could not be decided by reference to precedents or general instructions.

The Committee resolved on 20 July "that, having regard to the urgent necessity for munition workers, the Committee is of opinion that all Munition Volunteers not employed on work directly essential to the successful prosecution of the War should be regarded as available for transfer, subject only to the desirability of avoiding the actual closing of factories engaged in producing articles of national necessity; that in accordance with the above resolution individual members of the Committee should be asked to advise on particular groups of cases."<sup>3</sup>

It was recognized by the Ministry that the drastic action proposed would cause strong protest, but on 27 July Dr. Addison assented to it. Accordingly each member of the Committee undertook to adjudicate on the class of cases with which he was specially conversant, Mr. Alexander Duckham acting as Chief Adjudicator and as Chairman of the Committee when common action was necessary. Mr. Stephenson Kent assisted by Mr. Dugdale dealt with Mines, Quarries, Shipbuilding and Marine Engineering, Sir G. Croydon Marks and Mr. A. McD. Duckham with General Engineering, Sir E. de la Rue with the Motor Trade, Mr. W. H. Cowan with the Iron and Steel Trades, Mr. T. R. Johnson with the Railways, Mr. A. Illingworth with the Textile Trades including the manufacture of textile machinery, Mr. A. H. Goldfinch with the Clothing Trades, Mr. R. Burbidge with the manufacture of food and tobacco, Sir G. Younger with Breweries and Distilleries, Mr. A. Lupton with the Paper and Printing Trades, Mr. Thornton Smith with the Timber Trade, Mr. C. Walsh, K.C., with the Public Utility Services, and Sir John Aird with Builders and Contractors.

<sup>1</sup> HIST. REC./H/326.

<sup>2</sup> M.W. 41279.

<sup>3</sup> M.W. 24621.

Adjudication proved slower and more difficult than had been anticipated.<sup>1</sup> The information required on the original form of protest was inadequate for making a decision; it was therefore necessary to draft a more elaborate form and await its return. More than 7,000 cases were sent for inspection before 20 July and many more later; delay and hurried enquiry necessarily followed. The instructions to inspectors were not at first<sup>2</sup> precise enough, but in August<sup>3</sup> they were asked to state the firm's direct and indirect contracts for the War Departments; to see the order books and if necessary verify the work in the shops; to report on the nature of the work done by the men who had volunteered and what proportion of their time was engaged on munitions or export work. How many men were employed of the same grade as the Volunteers in question? Were they on overtime or short time? How far could the employer dispense with the Volunteers by giving up private work, by substituting unskilled men for skilled, by working overtime or in any other way? Would their transfer involve the dismissal of other employees, and if so, how many? Would it involve the shutting down of any department?

A sound decision presupposed accurate information on all these points. But time, experience, technical knowledge and determination were essential for the inspection of an establishment engaged in the execution of numerous orders, many of which might prove none the less important for the prosecution of the War, because they were indirect, while others might not be war work at all. It is therefore not surprising that on 27 August Mr. Alexander Duckham wrote as follows in his weekly report on the progress of adjudication<sup>4</sup>:—"This work of coming to a final decision is very difficult owing to the fact that it is apparently impossible to secure the necessary type of man for making these enquiries, either because he is lacking in the necessary knowledge or because he is not a sufficiently strong man to stand up to the employer or again because he thinks that he knows the sort of report which is good for us, and does not let us have the sort of report we require. Indeed the inadequacy of the reports is a very serious matter and one which will prove, I think, an insurmountable obstacle to any movement of this kind where it is necessary to investigate the conditions existing at the employers' works before a man is removed either on a voluntary or on a compulsory system." Again on 18 September Mr. Duckham wrote:—"Our experience shows that the only satisfactory way of coming to a decision is to send a really responsible person to the works who will make a selection on the spot and will if possible make it in consultation with, and with the agreement of, the employer, and send with his report a list of the Volunteers that he would recommend for transfer. In this way any serious disturbance of the work in the shop would be avoided, not to mention the subsequent protests which certainly often have much reason in them when they state that special operations have been disturbed. For it is quite impossible for the adjudicators to know exactly the position occupied by the various Volunteers in the system of the firm's work."

<sup>1</sup> M.W. 41279.

<sup>2</sup> C.O. Circ. 1893.

<sup>3</sup> Form W.M.V. 200A.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. M.W. 39822.

Not only was it difficult to ascertain the facts, but it was hard to decide what importance to attach to various classes of work other than munitions. Exports were clearly necessary to finance the War. Was it right then to transfer men from export work to munitions? The textile and the food trades employed a large number of hands, whose employment depended entirely on a few mechanics; most of their output was required for the Forces, for export, or to meet the needs of the civil population. The motor trade was occupied with big orders for motor transport and aeroplane engines. The Railway shops were engaged on munitions in so far as they were not required for the construction and maintenance of locomotives and rolling stock. Few men could be taken from the mines without risking a serious breakdown of their hauling and pumping machinery. Even if there was at the moment a surplus of labour in the ship-repairing yards, it was necessary to retain it against the contingency of a big naval engagement. In short it was clear that no sweeping transfers were practicable; if men were to be got, they could only be found here and there by patient investigation.

Apart from these difficulties, the time which necessarily elapsed between enrolment and adjudication transformed the conditions under which many of the men had enrolled. In the interval the policy of spreading contracts had been prosecuted with vigour. Patriotism and interest combined to make manufacturers anxious to undertake the contracts which Boards of Management were eager to place. Consequently many Volunteers employed on commercial work in June, were engaged on war work in August. The increasing difficulty of transfer owing to change of circumstances since enrolment is shown by the fact that although by 27 September 8,029 men had been accepted by employers and ordered to move, only 3,768 actually started work. For on receipt of the order to release the man, the employer protested in 4,511 cases on the ground that conditions had altered, and in 4,261 of these cases the protest was sustained as reasonable by the adjudicators who had in the first instance authorized the transfer.<sup>1</sup>

Finally many who had enrolled, volunteered in ignorance that they were engaged on work essential for the production of munitions. So much had been said about the shortage of shells and fuses that people were apt to consider nothing else genuine war work. Many, therefore, enrolled who at the time were employed on shell lathes, and other machine tools, machinery and materials, which were the prerequisites of any large increase in the output of guns and ammunition.

Consequently towards the end of August, 1915, the Committee of Adjudicators unanimously passed a resolution that in view of their experience of adjudicating upon and enquiry into disputed cases of enrolment they were of the opinion that the present scheme for transferring skilled labour was impracticable and likely to produce extensive dislocation of trade and possibly labour trouble, without attaining an adequate result in materially increasing the output of munitions of war.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> C.M.L.S.C. Memorandum 6, by Mr. C. F. Rey.

<sup>2</sup> HIST. REC./H/326/1. For subsequent action see Chap. III., Sect. VII.

### V. Demand for Labour.

In the meantime efforts had been made to ascertain the extent and intensity of the demand for skilled labour. The National Clearing House Newspaper showed in detail the applications made to the Labour Exchanges which could not be satisfied locally, but afforded no indication of the relative urgency of these demands. It was hoped<sup>1</sup> that information on this question might be obtained from the Contracts Departments of the Admiralty and the War Office and the Supply Departments of the Ministry. Accordingly on 6 July Mr. Rey met representatives of these Departments and proposed that they should supply the Munitions Workers' Enrolment Department (*a*) with a list of firms classified in three groups according to the relative urgency of their products for war purposes, (*b*) with a list of firms from whom it was important that no labour should be withdrawn except men found after special investigation not to be employed on war work.

The Department of Munitions Supply replied on 12 July (*a*) that the demands of all controlled firms engaged on work for the Ministry might be considered urgent, (*b*) that the second proposal would involve much labour and little gain. He could not give the proportion of Government work on which a firm was engaged; even if that were possible, he could not say whether a particular workman was engaged on war work or not. Any attempt to collect information for the Labour Department would involve duplication of effort rather than co-operation. He would pass on complaints or enquiries from the contractors and sub-contractors of the Ministry, and advise which of the two firms should receive preferential treatment.

On 30 July the Secretary to the Admiralty, referring to the conference on 6 July, forwarded to the Ministry without any indication of relative urgency a list of some 450 firms, "whose requirements for labour may always be considered important, if Admiralty work is a ground of application for assistance." Should other firms not on the list specially require labour, the Labour Department would be informed as soon as their demands became known to the Admiralty.<sup>2</sup>

The failure of this effort to obtain precise and detailed information from the Supply Departments revealed the magnitude of the problem which confronted the Labour Department. Before it could hope to effect an economical distribution of the skilled labour available, knowledge of the actual position of several thousand firms engaged more or less on work of national importance must be built up laboriously by the collation of inspectors' reports with information from the Supply Departments concerning the relative urgency of each class of war material. It was necessary to investigate the equipment and organisation of each workshop in order to discover whether skilled labour was being squandered on machines or by methods of production which were out-of-date and to what extent firms were actually engaged on work of importance for the prosecution of the War. It was essential to correlate the results of those investigations in the light of the

<sup>1</sup> M.W. 42911.

<sup>2</sup> M.W. 23589.

requirements for war material, for export, and for maintenance, as they varied from time to time in extent and intensity.

But the knowledge essential for real organisation would take many months to build up. In the meantime the Demand Section of the Department had to make the best of the applications which it received. There were the unsatisfied demands recorded in the National Clearing House Newspaper, and many requests for labour came directly from Munitions Committees and from firms. But during the greater part of July it looked as if the Muniton Volunteer Scheme would be more likely to fail on the side of demand than on that of supply.<sup>1</sup> Consequently early in July 35 armament firms, which it was proposed to control, were invited by telegram to return their requirements for skilled labour. After some hesitation (for many of them were not eager to employ Muniton Volunteers), they sent in a demand for about 11,000 men. On 24 July a circular letter<sup>2</sup> was sent to some 270 controlled establishments, inviting them to notify the Labour Supply Department of the number of men in each trade whom they could employ immediately on Government work, and explaining the conditions on which Muniton Volunteers, Released Soldiers and Canadians might be obtained. After a reminder this circular brought in a demand for 7,064 workmen. On 29 July another circular was sent to 1,000 firms, which, though not controlled, were understood to be engaged on Government work, and this produced a demand for 4,368 men from 272 firms. These demands were indexed, classified and checked to prevent duplication, and to them were added the orders from controlled firms and other firms backed by Government Departments, as they appeared from day to day in the National Clearing House Newspaper.

Attempts were made to ascertain from the officers in the various Supply Departments and from inspectors' reports how urgent the requirements of each firm were. But for some time there was little more to work upon than *obiter dicta* and general presumptions such as the fact of Government control or contracts afforded. Such evidence the Labour Department supplemented<sup>3</sup> after 29 July by requiring as a condition of satisfying any demand for Muniton Volunteers or Soldiers that the firm should sign a declaration<sup>4</sup> that it had no men, engaged on private work, suitable to perform the work for which men were asked, that the men sent would be employed solely on munitions, and that on the termination of the work for which they were engaged, the Ministry of Munitions would at once be notified. A month later a further condition was added. A declaration<sup>5</sup> was required that an application for labour of the kind needed had been made without success to the Labour Exchange. This could be checked by reference to the National Clearing House Register; it also made that Register a more accurate representation of the demand for labour, and prevented the offer of Soldiers or Muniton Volunteers where a vacancy could be filled locally.

<sup>1</sup> M.W. 41279

<sup>2</sup> M.W. 42728. M.W. 40933.

<sup>3</sup> M.W. 25905.

<sup>4</sup> Form S.S.1.

<sup>5</sup> Form S.S. 1.A.

## VI. Allocation of Mmunition Volunteers.

The procedure by which War Mmunition Volunteers were allocated remains to be considered. By the terms of enrolment they could only be transferred to controlled firms, the first list of which was issued on 12 July. By 6 August 345 establishments had been declared controlled, including the armament firms and the principal firms engaged on ships, aircraft, and machine tools. The enrolment forms of the men available for transfer were sent to the Allocation Section of the Department and then distributed according to the place of enrolment to five sub-sections, each in charge of a Labour Exchange officer acquainted with the local conditions of the area which concerned him. These enrolment forms constituted the "Live Register." The demands from the controlled firms were distributed geographically to the officers in charge of the Live Register who endeavoured to satisfy the orders, if possible locally, if not, from the district most like that from which the orders came. Having selected a man apparently suitable, the officer sent a form to the employer showing the man's qualifications and requesting a reply within three days.

If the man was accepted, his present and prospective employers were informed of his transfer and he was told when and where to report and sent a Railway warrant, if necessary. If the man was not accepted, his enrolment form was retained in the Live Register, until it was clear that he could not be placed.

The men, against whose release their employers did not protest, numbered 23,000. But many of them were not highly skilled and for other reasons were the least suitable of all who enrolled. It was necessary, however, to begin with them; and unfortunately the Department, being pressed for results, did not wait for applications, but submitted to important establishments, which it was intended to control, a number of these men who in the opinion of the Department were likely to be required. The bulk of the offers were rejected.<sup>1</sup>

Neither the Admiralty Dockyards nor the Royal Torpedo Factory at Greenock were prepared to venture the employment of Mmunition Volunteers with subsistence allowances alongside of other workmen who perhaps had also left their homes to do war work, before the Volunteer scheme was launched, and many private firms took the same line, at any rate for a time, notably Messrs. Vickers. Even if they were ready to run some risk in order to get a first-rate workman, they would not do so for the sake of a man who might prove unsuitable when his paper qualifications were put to the test. No doubt also employers were prejudiced against the subsistence allowance, which had been a stumbling block in their negotiations with the Trade Unions during the early months of the War for an agreement to increase output.<sup>2</sup> But these fears were not justified by events. Partly through the efforts of the Trade Union officials, and the National Advisory Committee who issued a circular letter on the subject in August, partly because the Volunteer's subsistence allowance was similar to the lodging money,

<sup>1</sup> M.W. 41279.

<sup>2</sup> See Vol. I., Part II., Chap. II. Sect. II.

customarily paid to outworkers in some trades, very little trouble was in fact caused by the placing of Volunteers among other workmen.

Towards the end of July the Demand and Allocation Sections were united in what was subsequently known as the Supply and Demand (S.D.) Section. At the same time it was decided to transfer to London the Labour Supply functions of the North East Coast and Clyde Armaments Committees.<sup>1</sup>

During August the adjudicators dealt with the great bulk of the protests against transfer, and it became clear that the supply of suitable and available Volunteers was quite inadequate to the demand. Moreover there was nothing to guide the allocation officers in deciding which of the many firms demanding labour should have the preference. The consequence was a certain number of maladroit transfers,<sup>2</sup> which, though probably a very small proportion of the whole, yet afforded an effective target for criticism; and the criticism was the more severe, because it was considered that the allocation would have been better managed if it had been decentralized and entrusted either to the Area Office or to the Munitions Committee. On 31 August therefore, it was decided in effect to scrap the existing register of demands and to start afresh by sending through from the Demand to the Allocation branch only new orders which came through the National Clearing House from controlled firms or such other firms as were backed by special recommendation from a Government Department. Further, save under exceptional circumstances, no new order should be allowed to remain on the register for more than a fortnight. Finally it was proposed to discontinue offering men who had been rejected several times. "We know that in the majority of cases they are not really suitable to the work, and the sooner we cease offering them the better, as it will only lead to the men who are taken on being quickly discharged."

## VII. Results of W.M.V. Scheme. July to September, 1915.

Owing to the large proportion of unsuitable men among those to whose transfer their employers offered no protest, and the small number who proved available where protests were made, Mr. Rey reported on 27 September the following figures concerning the scheme at that date.<sup>3</sup> Out of 102,000 Muniton Volunteers who had enrolled, 37,551 had been submitted to employers, of whom 28,551 had been rejected and 8,581 accepted; but of the latter only 4,529 had actually started work, including 721 placed by the Clyde and North East Coast Armaments Committees. Protests against transfer were made in respect of 66,607 men, of whom 43,354 were adjudicated as not available for transfer, 2,811 as available for transfer only in emergency; 12,745 were passed for transfer in the first instance, but the order was cancelled in 4,261 cases after reconsideration by the adjudicators. There remained 1,698 Volunteers who were at the time under submission to employers, 19,864 who had been relegated to the Dead Register as

<sup>1</sup> M.W. 25224    <sup>2</sup> M.W. 36529; M.W. 37952; M.W. 35822; M.W. 39065.

<sup>3</sup> C.M.L.S.C. Memorandum 6.

unsuitable, 9,981 who were still retained on the Live Register, and 7,697 whose cases were under consideration, awaiting inspectors' reports or not yet dealt with.

Although the number of men transferred was not large, the amount of correspondence arising out of their transfer was so considerable, that early in August a new Section of the Labour Supply Department was set up to deal with it. The question which caused most trouble was the rate of wages to which the transferred Volunteer was entitled. His contract with the Ministry gave him the right to claim the rate which he was receiving before transfer, if that happened to be higher than the rate of the shop to which he was transferred. But what the difference really was could not in many cases be determined without laborious enquiry.<sup>1</sup> For it required the comparison of piece rates in one shop and time rates in the other, or different piece rates, or weekly rates for differing weekly hours, or weekly rates here and hourly rates there, not to mention war bonus calculated on different principles or no principle at all. Overtime, travelling allowances and compensation for unemployment also involved troublesome questions. Many Volunteers regarded the Ministry as a guardian to whom they might refer every difficulty and grievance for advice and redress. In fact there was hardly a point in all the variety of industrial conditions and practices of this Country on which the Department was not called upon at one time or another to advise or adjudicate.

The reasons why the War Mmunition Volunteer scheme disappointed the high hopes which had been formed of it have already been indicated, but the significance of the experiment perhaps justifies some further reflections. As Adam Smith observed, "A man is of all sorts of luggage the most difficult to be transported." Family ties, local connections and prejudices, differences in manners, mode of living, and dialect, the craftsman's expectations, and conservative habits, all presented obstacles to the free transfer from one part of the country to another of the men whose steadiness, experience and skill were most keenly sought after. In spite of these obstacles 100,000 men pledged themselves to go wherever they were sent. Most of them were skilled mechanics, and enrolled believing that they were engaged on unessential work and would be transferred in a few days to urgent war work. Yet, in the course of three months less than 5,000 of them were moved.

The primary cause of the disparity between the effort and the result was the fact that, whereas enrolment required for success the hustle and excitement of an intensive recruiting campaign, allocation and transfer assumed a knowledge of the individual workman's capacity and function and a sound estimate of the relative importance for the purpose of carrying on the War not only of the industries of the country but of particular factories and even of the several classes of work being done in those factories. The collection of so vast a body of information and its articulation on a reasoned system of priority required the assembly of a large staff of technical experts and many months of assiduous work. Moreover the problem was complicated

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<sup>1</sup> See Vol. IV., Part IV., Chap. II.

on the one hand by the rapid expansion of the demand for war material consequent upon the spreading of contracts and the recognition of the necessity for broadening the basis of production, on the other hand by the fact that the drain on the man-power of the country could only be made good by a re-organisation of the workshop, and the introduction of new methods of manufacture and new machinery and plant.

If the Ministry had started with the information and the staff which were collected in the course of the following year, there can be no doubt that a greater proportion of the Volunteers could have been moved ; but on the other hand the need for moving them would have been less pressing, inasmuch as the armament firms would have realised the possibility of meeting their immediate requirements out of their own resources. Even as it was, larger results might perhaps have been obtained, if the Government had from the outset decentralized the work of allocation and transfer by reinforcing the Munitions Committees with a strong official element, and by placing at their disposal the local administrative machinery of the Labour Exchanges. Where so much depended on detailed information about individual workmen and firms, local knowledge, personal investigation and a restricted field were more likely to attain fruitful results than a national system centralized in Whitehall and operating by means of correspondence, reports and forms. But this policy, if it was ever considered seriously, was presumably set aside because it was felt not only that each local committee would jealously retain labour which in the national interest should be transferred to other districts, but that it could not judge the relative importance of the various industries, factories and contracts as well as a central body in immediate touch with the Supply and Contracts departments. It may be doubted, however, whether these considerations were incapable of reconciliation.

Notwithstanding the immediate failure of the scheme, the enrolment of 100,000 Volunteers became a factor of the first importance in the organisation of the supply of skilled labour for the production of munitions. Dispersed as they were throughout the engineering and shipbuilding firms of the country, the fear of their removal afforded a strong inducement to employers to turn over from commercial to Government work as rapidly as possible, and subsequently became the principal lever for enforcing the policy of dilution in accordance with the wishes of the Ministry.

## CHAPTER II.

### RELEASE FROM THE COLOURS.

#### I. Lord Kitchener's Scheme.

The principle of releasing from service with the Colours soldiers who were needed for indispensable industrial work had been accepted by the War Office at the beginning of the year. On 22 January, 1915, a circular letter<sup>1</sup> had been sent in accordance with instructions from the Army Council to the Commander-in-Chief of the Army in the Field, and to all Commanding Officers at home, informing them that in view of the urgency of Army contracts for war material, it was necessary to withdraw from the Army certain men whose services were specially required in their former employment. Nominal rolls of these men would be sent to the officers in command of units. "The individual men concerned should be sent for and informed by their Commanding Officer, that, for the good of the Service, it is considered necessary that they should go back to the work which they left to join their unit, and that orders have been received from Lord Kitchener to tell them that their service at the armament works where they were employed and will be employed again, is considered by him as being equal to service with the Army, and that, should it be possible later on in the campaign to utilise abroad against the enemy the military training they have received, Lord Kitchener will then bring them back to the Colours to take part in the war. They will continue to be soldiers, and will wear their uniforms when and where they like."

Releases for munitions work were effected in two ways. An employer might apply for the release to himself of a soldier who had been in his employ before joining the Forces. If the soldier was willing to return to the employer and the application was granted; the release was known as an "individual release." Or a soldier might declare his willingness to go back to his trade, undertaking to work wherever he was sent. If his industrial qualifications appeared satisfactory and were of a kind urgently required for munitions, he might be released to an important firm to meet their demand for labour of that kind. This was known under an inconvenient and somewhat misleading term as "bulk release."

In the Spring of 1915 a considerable number of men were released by the War Office to approved firms. When the Armaments Output Committee was set up, the duty of making recommendations to the

<sup>1</sup> M.W. 23068 Cts/1268/A.G. 1. See also Vol. I., Part II. p. 12.

Adjutant-General for release was devolved upon it; and after the establishment of the Ministry the work was carried on at Armament Buildings until 4 July, 1915.<sup>1</sup> The names of the soldiers were obtained either from the firms' applications for the release of particular men or by the visits of Staff Officers to selected units accompanied by representatives of the firms to examine the men and arrange terms. How many soldiers were released in this way is uncertain; but from a census taken in June, 1916, of all soldiers then employed on munitions work the number of soldiers released before 4 July, 1915, was estimated at 5,025, of whom 4,184 were released in bulk and 841 in answer to direct applications for individual men.

## II. First Bulk Scheme. June to September 1915.

But a larger scheme and a more systematic procedure were necessary. On 9 June a circular letter was sent from the Ministry to engineering and shipbuilding firms asking them to give the names, trades, regimental numbers and units of skilled men in their employ who had joined the Forces. On the same day the Adjutant-General sent out a telegram<sup>2</sup> to the Commanding Officers of certain units calling for returns of skilled men in certain trades who were under their command. Towards the end of the month, Mr. Lloyd George took the matter up with Lord Kitchener and wrote a letter to him on 30 June in order to put on record the arrangements they had made.<sup>3</sup> "I understood you to say," he wrote, "that you would be willing that any of such men should be released on the request of the Ministry of Munitions, provided that men in a unit now serving outside the United Kingdom, should, for the present, at any rate, be "barred." I am not sure whether you did not wish to make a saving also in respect of the proportion of men that should be taken from any one unit."

Lord Kitchener replied<sup>4</sup> on 3 July :

"I am anxious that you should have such skilled men as are urgently required for the manufacture of munitions and who are now serving in the Army. I do not bar any such men whether they are serving at home or abroad, but I am sure we should do well to begin by taking those serving in the units which have not yet completed their training, and that until we have exhausted this source of supply we should leave alone those which are abroad or are standing ready to go abroad. Regular troops other than the above will thus be placed at your disposal to select from as a commencement, together with the whole of the Territorial Force in England, the Special Reserve and the garrisons manning the Coast Defences, a total of well over 1,000,000.

"You are right in suggesting that we must not allow too high a proportion of men to be taken out of any one unit. Should any case arise in which I may find that the fighting

<sup>1</sup> M.W. 24580. See Vol. I., Part III., Chap. V., Sect. 7.

<sup>2</sup> No. 3461.

<sup>3</sup> M.W. 10061.

<sup>4</sup> M.W. 10061.

efficiency of a unit will suffer considerably by the drain of men for munitions I will let you know and frame rules on the subject. As, however, I do not anticipate such a contingency, I think that we need not now consider how to meet it.

“ I am sending copies of this letter to the Chief of the Imperial General Staff and the Adjutant-General and I am sure you can rely upon us all to help you.

“ There may be difficulties in getting men to leave active service for munition work, but I have little doubt that the Army will be able greatly to assist in manning the shops producing the material on which they rely.”

On 7 July Sir R. H. Brade wrote,<sup>1</sup> in reply to a letter from Sir H. Llewellyn Smith, of 5 July, concurring in his proposal that the Commanding Officer of each battalion at home, not included in the First, Second, or Third Armies or the First Line of the Territorial Force, should be supplied with a list of the names of his men, obtained from the returns asked for by the Ministry of Munitions on 9 June or called for by the Adjutant-General's telegram of the same date, and should be instructed to give facilities for an expert investigator acting on behalf of the Ministry of Munitions, to visit his unit in order to ascertain which of these men would be willing to undertake munitions work as and when requested to do so by the Ministry of Munitions, and to obtain full particulars of the industrial qualifications of the men volunteering. The War Office would instruct Commanding Officers that the men so selected might be released from the Colours.

At the beginning of July Major Scott was appointed to take charge of the Release from the Colours and to organise for that purpose a section as a part of the Labour Supply Department of the Ministry. On 8 July instructions<sup>2</sup> were issued by Mr. Rey, through the Divisional Officers of Labour Exchanges to the officers in charge of the Munitions Work Bureaux, giving lists of soldiers serving near each Bureau who were *prima facie* suitable for munitions work, and instructing them to arrange with the Commanding Officer of each unit for a visit to enrol those who were willing to return to their trade.

On the enrolment form<sup>3</sup> the soldier gave particulars of his industrial history and qualifications and declared that he was prepared to undertake munitions work in any establishment named by the Minister of Munitions for so long as required by him, on condition : (1) that he should report himself to his unit for military duty as soon as he ceased to be so employed ; (2) that he should receive the district rate of wages or his Army pay and allowances, whichever was the greater ; (3) that if he was unavoidably separated from his family or dependents, separation allowance (less the portion allotted by himself) should be issued to his wife or dependents under the usual conditions, as a clear addition to any other earnings or emoluments.

<sup>1</sup> M.W. 10061. 19/Gen. No./5415/A.G. 1.

<sup>2</sup> M.W. 17853.

<sup>3</sup> Form. R.C. 1. See Appendix II.

Soldiers available for release were handed over to Demands Section for allocation, their enrolment forms being placed alongside of the Live Register of Munition Volunteers. If an approved demand could only be satisfied by the release of a soldier, the particulars were submitted to the employer, and if he accepted the man and signed the necessary declaration<sup>1</sup> the case was transferred to R.C. Section which issued specific instructions for the soldier's release to the Officer Commanding his unit, a general authority to that effect having already been given to him by the Director of Organisation.

The investigations based on the circular letter and telegram of 9 June failed to provide a reservoir of skilled men at all commensurate with the demand. Although more than 50,000 names were sent in, few soldiers were made available for munitions. Many had gone abroad; many more were in "barred" units at home, which contained the flower of the skilled mechanics who had volunteered; others were not skilled; and in a very large number of cases no particulars concerning the units in which the men were serving could be obtained. Moreover, as Mr. Lloyd George told the House of Commons on 20 December, 1915<sup>2</sup> :—

"We are trying to get men from the Colours, but it is a great rearguard action. It is like getting through barbed wire entanglements without heavy guns. There are entrenchments behind entrenchments. You have not merely the Army, the corps, the division, the brigade, the battalion, and the company, but the platoon, and even the squad—everybody fighting to prevent men from coming away. I am not surprised. I am not blaming them. Skilled men at any trade are skilled men at every trade. Your intelligent skilled man is a good man in the trenches and nobody wants to lose him. Therefore, every corporal fights against parting with a good, intelligent, skilled workman. As my hon. friend points out, the men themselves feel that they are running away from danger in order to go back to comfort and high wages and emoluments, and they do not like it. It is a very creditable story. At last I think we are beginning to get over these difficulties, largely through the pertinacity and tact of Major Scott."

For these reasons up to the end of October only 2,000 men were released in bulk through the Release from the Colours Section and placed on munitions work, the weekly averages being 196 in August, 168 in September, and 94 in October.

### III. Individual Release.

#### A. N.C.O.'S AND MEN.

The policy of releasing individual soldiers to their old employers on direct application for their services was more successful. By the

<sup>1</sup> Form S.S. 1. See p. 12.

<sup>2</sup> *Parliamentary Debates* (1915), *H. of C.*, LXXVII., 119.

end of October, 3,097 such releases had been effected, the weekly averages being 379 in August, 225 in September and 113 in October. Major Scott considered this form of release preferable, if circumstances justified it. On 29 March, 1916, he wrote<sup>1</sup> as follows: "My experience shows the desirability of placing a soldier with his old employer so far as that may be possible and desirable in accordance with the urgency and extent of the employer's demand. The reasons for my opinion are the following:—

"(1) A soldier who has returned to work with his own employer has been found to be a more efficient workman than a stranger. This naturally follows from the fact that he knows the work and the whole working conditions, and is presumably back again at his own home as well as his old bench.

"(2) Transfers rarely take place in such cases, which shows that both the employer and the employee are satisfied.

"(3) Dismissals are equally rare in these cases and great advantage results.

"(4) Employers who have been paying special allowances to the wives and dependents of previous employees who enlisted create great difficulties when they find that these employees are now working elsewhere.

"(5) There is a saving of public funds in so far as separation allowance paid to the man's wife, etc., if he is separated from home, is greater than family or other allowance which falls to be paid to him if he is living at home."

Applications for the release of individual soldiers were dealt with in the following manner. At first, if a controlled firm applied for a skilled man, and the man's unit was not "barred," R.C. Section prepared a letter directing the Officer Commanding to release him, which was signed and dispatched by the Director of Organisation from the War Office. If the firm was not controlled, the application was referred to Demands Section for recommendation. If an inspection was required, the inspector was instructed<sup>2</sup> to verify the statements made by the firm concerning their war work on hand. What proportion of their output did this represent? If all the men asked for were released, would the firm be employed solely on war work; and to what extent would their output be increased? Was it important that the firm should get their former employees back, or would other labour of the same grade serve as well? If the application was approved, the release was carried out by R.C. Section in the manner just described.

Towards the end of July all firms, whether controlled or not, were required to sign the declaration<sup>3</sup> that they had no men engaged on private work, suitable to perform the work for which they asked that soldiers should be released, and that they would employ the men sent solely on munitions of war. A month later a more elaborate declaration<sup>4</sup> was required, in which the firm stated in addition that they had

<sup>1</sup> M.W. 63424/21.

<sup>2</sup> Form V. 1.

<sup>3</sup> Form S.S. 1.

<sup>4</sup> Form R.C. 22.

applied, without success, for men of the class required to the Labour Exchange, and, if controlled, for War Munitions Volunteers also, and undertook that they would not dismiss a released soldier without giving the Ministry of Munitions one week's notice and the reasons for the dismissal. The former condition was required to make good an understanding with the War Office that soldiers would not be called back, until all civilian sources of supply had been exhausted; the latter, in order to give the Ministry an opportunity of placing the man elsewhere and to prevent the arbitrary dismissal of released soldiers, which had occurred on more than one occasion.<sup>1</sup> It was of the first importance that R.C. Section should have a complete record of every released soldier and his movements, so that the War Office might be able to recall him to the Colours or communicate with him at any moment.

#### B. OFFICERS.

If a private firm applied for the release of an officer, Major Scott first satisfied himself that the officer was willing to return to civil employment, that the Officer Commanding his unit was agreeable to release him, that he possessed special qualifications in connection with the production of munitions and that the firm was engaged on urgent work for which the officer's services were necessary. He then referred the application to the Secretary of State for War with a recommendation that it be granted for a definite period, subject to renewal if the Ministry recommended and the Army Council agreed.

All negotiations with the War Office concerning the employment of officers within the Ministry itself or in connection with the Royal Arsenal, National Factories or other munition works directly organised by the Ministry were managed by the Parliamentary Military Secretary.

#### IV. Releases from Barred Units.

On 10 August Mr. Lloyd George again wrote<sup>2</sup> to Lord Kitchener: "In pursuance of arrangements already made to secure the release of men from the Colours for skilled work, we are taking men, in the first instance, as suggested by you, only from the Depôts, Reserves, Fourth and Fifth New Armies, and the Second and Third Lines of the Territorial Force.

"Cases arise, however, in which an employer engaged on urgent Government work asks specially for some particular man who has special qualifications for his work. Very often we find that the man is in one of the units, from which, under present arrangements, we are not able to draw men. To give a single instance: out of 460 names of men specially submitted to us from a number of Sheffield firms, we were able to find only 76 in units from which we could release the men in the ordinary way.

"I do not, of course, suggest that anything like the whole of the rest could or should be released. Some of them, though the employer

<sup>1</sup> Cf. M.W. 30022.

<sup>2</sup> M.W. 26915.

had asked for them specially, could probably be replaced by other men brought from elsewhere. In such individual cases, however, where we are satisfied both that the work is really urgent and that the soldier asked for has special qualifications, I should like to be in a position to get him back even though he may be in one of the Armies from which we cannot draw men in bulk. I think this would be in accord with the spirit of your last letter to me, which suggests that without actually barring any unit at all, we should work, in the first instance, upon certain units in this country, but should have recourse to the others if this failed.

" I hope, therefore, you may feel able to accede to this suggestion and let us in individual cases, for special reasons, get skilled men back to their previous occupations, even though these men are not in the units upon which we are at present able to operate. I can promise that the power we ask shall only be sparingly used in cases of real urgency."

Lord Kitchener replied on 11 August: " We will do our best to give you the men you require, but I feel that we must be careful in taking the necessary action when they are on active service or when about to go out, as I have heard, on good authority, that many men are trying to evade service in the field by obtaining billets on munitions work.

" I think, therefore, that when a case arises of men who are practically in the firing line being urgently required for munitions work, it should be specially investigated with a view to preventing shirking, for this if once really started, would have a very bad effect on the Army generally.

" I fully realise that your people are only taking men who are really required and useful, but the question of bringing men back from the fighting line is much more difficult to deal with than the cases that have arisen hitherto, and will require careful consideration in each instance.

" If your office will let us know their requirements, we will try to work out a practical solution by a little experimental work before laying down any definite rules."

As a result of this letter, very strong applications for the " individual " release of pivotal men from barred units at home and abroad were from time to time put forward by R.C. Section in the form of recommendations to the War Office.

## **V. Negotiations for Second Bulk Scheme. August to September, 1915.**

Mr. Lloyd George's letter unfortunately by raising the smaller question in this direct way to some degree embarrassed the extension of the scheme for bulk releases which was imperative if any considerable number of skilled men were to be obtained from the Army. Neverthe-

less, Major Scott decided that his proposals ought not to be delayed, and, therefore, on 18 August he drew up a memorandum explaining the serious defects of the existing scheme and proposing a thorough search for the skilled men who were serving in all units that had not yet gone abroad.

Major Scott pointed out<sup>1</sup> that since he took charge of R.C. Department on 4 July, instructions for the release of 2,210 soldiers had been given in response to direct applications from employers for the services of individual men, but of these only 1,215 had as yet reported for duty. Delay in executing the instructions frequently arose from the omission of the War Office to supply officers in command with copies of their letters<sup>2</sup> laying down the conditions of release. In other cases the commanding officer failed to carry out the instructions. Again, the fact that units were barred often prevented employers from obtaining the return of pivotal men. The scheme for releases in bulk, based on the circular of 9 June to 8,500 firms, after much time and labour had been spent, had made only 1,387 skilled men available, of whom 857 had been placed. Not more than another 1,200 men could possibly be extracted from the Army under the existing system. Major Scott therefore proposed that a census should now be taken of all the skilled men in the Forces stationed in the United Kingdom, with the exception of those units in which they were employed as artificers. Their qualifications should be examined by skilled investigators, accompanied by officers representing the Ministry. All men selected should be detained in this country at the disposal of the Ministry, unless the Ministry dispensed with their services. For this purpose they might, perhaps, be transferred to the last formed battalion of their regiment.

On 21 August Dr. Addison forwarded Major Scott's description and criticism of the existing procedure to the Adjutant-General, Sir H. C. Sclater. On the same day the Ministry received an official letter<sup>3</sup> from the Army Council, saying it was understood that delay had arisen in obtaining the services of soldiers whose release the Council had authorised or were prepared to authorise. They desired to do all they could to help the Ministry, and asked for particulars of avoidable difficulties or delays.

Two days later Sir H. Llewellyn Smith sent a minute<sup>4</sup> to Dr. Addison, saying that the one condition precedent to any effective move forward was a change in the point of view of the War Office, which would cause them to give the Ministry active help instead of putting discouragements in their way. Whether this change could be effected without a clear mandate from the Government was, perhaps, doubtful, but he had received a private note from Sir R. H. Brade and an official letter which indicated a desire to overcome the difficulties arising out of the present procedure. Given the change of attitude, the Ministry should try to get the War Office to agree to Major Scott's scheme. On the same day Dr. Addison conferred with the Adjutant-General.

<sup>1</sup> R.C. 05787.

<sup>2</sup> Contracts/1268 (F2) of 22 May and 29 June, 1915.

<sup>3</sup> 19/Gen. No./5415. A.G. 1 (R).

<sup>4</sup> R.C. 05787.

On 24 August Sir H. Llewellyn Smith wrote<sup>1</sup> to General Sclater, enclosing Major Scott's proposed scheme for releases in bulk, and the amendments desired in the system for dealing with individual applications: "I shall be very glad," he added, "to hear from you as soon as possible, whether a scheme on these lines would meet with the approval and active co-operation of the War Office. Its success obviously depends in the main on enlisting the active help of commanding officers by getting them to feel the importance of expediting munitions from the Army's point of view."

On 26 August Sir H. Llewellyn Smith sent a note to Sir R. H. Brade, in which he said: "Every day brings further evidence of the fact that we shall have to rely more and more on the Release from the Colours to obtain the skilled labour that we need. I earnestly hope, therefore, that we shall soon be able to get the new scheme in working order."

On the following day the Ministry received a letter<sup>2</sup> from the Army Council, referring to the conference between Dr. Addison and the Adjutant-General. It was clear that the information given by contractors to the Ministry in reply to the circular of 9 June was very inaccurate. As a remedy, new measures must be adopted, which would bring the experts of the Ministry into closer touch with those soldiers who claimed to have the qualifications necessary for munitions work. The Council, therefore, proposed that skilled investigators of the Ministry should make a thorough enquiry, visit each unit of the Army serving at home, examine and record the qualifications of the men whom they considered suitable for expert work on the manufacture of munitions. On lists so framed, the Council and the Ministry could concert action for the speedy disposal of the men required. Commanding officers would be instructed to facilitate in every way the work of the investigators. All units serving at home, not actually preparing for dispatch to the front, would in future be available for individual releases.

On 28 August General Sclater acknowledged<sup>3</sup> Sir H. Llewellyn Smith's letter of 24 August and the memoranda enclosed. He hoped to arrange a system which would work speedily and in a way satisfactory to the Ministry and the War Office. He promised to do all he could to help. Sir H. Llewellyn Smith replied on 1 September, saying the main point was that any workable scheme must include some effective means whereby the Ministry could readily and certainly lay their hands on any man registered, as and when a demand for his services as a munition worker arose, and call him up for munition work by a simple and direct summons from the Ministry.

On 1 September Dr. Addison again conferred<sup>4</sup> with the Adjutant-General, who proposed that the War Office should instruct Commanding Officers to prepare from the attestation papers of their men a *bona fide* and complete list of the men experienced in the munition trades. He also suggested that units should be paraded, and all men qualified

<sup>1</sup> R.C. 05787. <sup>2</sup> 19/Gen. No./5449 A.G. 1. <sup>3</sup> R.C. 05787. <sup>4</sup> R.C. 05787.

for munition work invited to fall out. If adequate lists could not be obtained in either of these ways, any other steps necessary should be taken. A Staff Officer should accompany the officer of the Ministry in visiting units, and see that the procedure was carried out in accordance with the intentions of the Government.

The following day Major Scott wrote a minute<sup>1</sup> with reference to this interview. The Army Council had not criticised his scheme in detail, nor had they stated whether they accepted it or not. There should be no doubt concerning the exceptions, if any, to the principle that all skilled workmen in munition trades in the Army at home should be retained in the United Kingdom and made available for munition work. The Adjutant-General had referred to troops "on the eve of departure" being excepted; and Major Scott gathered that the whole of the 3rd New Army, 150,000 men, fell within that category. "I respectfully suggest," he continued, "that the time has gone past for tinkering with this subject and for amiable expressions lacking in detail, and I would most earnestly press for a written assurance from the War Office that they undertake to retain in this country all skilled munition workers at present in the Army stationed in this country without exception of any kind." Skilled men withdrawn from the 3rd Army could be replaced by unskilled men withdrawn from the 4th Army. Major Scott approved of the suggestion that the men should be paraded by companies and invited to volunteer for munitions work; but he pointed out that statements in the attestation papers concerning occupations were frequently false or inaccurate.

On 3 September an official letter was sent to the Secretary of the War Office.<sup>2</sup> The Minister concurred in the proposal that skilled investigators should visit each unit. "In order that these visits may result in a really complete record of all qualified men, the Minister considers it essential that by an Army Order or otherwise it should be brought clearly to the notice of officers commanding units and through them to the men themselves, that in view of the extreme need for skilled men in the engineering and shipbuilding trades it is the duty of every such man who has joined the Forces now to offer himself for munitions work . . . . It appears to the Minister essential that all units without exception, whether on the ground of approaching departure from the United Kingdom or on any other ground, should be available for investigation. He regards it as of vital importance to prevent any more skilled men from leaving the country, since their recall must be a matter of great difficulty . . . . Men recorded and adjudged suitable should be kept available to be sent to munitions work the moment they are required upon a simple order sent from the Ministry of Munitions to the Officer Commanding the unit in which such men may then be serving . . . . In taking names in the Artillery and Ordnance Services or mounted corps it will be clearly understood that artificers, employed in their own corps as such, cannot be spared for munitions work, as the efficiency of their units would be destroyed. Individual releases should be allowed, whether units are preparing for despatch or

<sup>1</sup> R.C. 05787.

<sup>2</sup> R.C. 05787.

not . . . . With respect to the suggestion made by the Adjutant-General at the interview on 1 September that the attestation papers of all soldiers should be examined to discover skilled men, the Minister thinks this might be a useful supplementary method of making sure that the skilled men had in fact been discovered, provided this does not involve excessive labour . . . . But visits to units should not be delayed on this account."

On 4 September the Ministry received from the Army Council for their concurrence and remarks a letter<sup>1</sup> which it was proposed to issue concerning the new scheme for Releases in Bulk to the Officers in command of all units serving at home with the exception of the 3rd New Army. The letter was neutral and gave no clear lead to Commanding Officers.

The Ministry replied<sup>2</sup> on 7 September: The Minister considered it essential that the Army Council in their instructions to Commanding and Staff Officers should clearly express the view that in the present crisis it was the duty of every soldier who was a skilled munition worker to offer his services in that capacity. The Minister objected to the exclusion of the 3rd New Army. The Nominal Roll should include all men claiming the necessary skill without reference to their willingness to take up munitions work. Whether they were willing or not would be ascertained by the investigator at the interview. The Minister would be glad to see the Army Council's instructions to Staff Officers. He presumed that all men on the Nominal Rolls would be retained in the United Kingdom and be at the disposal of the Ministry for purpose of release; but he would be glad to have this confirmed.

On the same day the Adjutant-General wrote<sup>3</sup> to Sir H. Llewellyn Smith, stating that Lord Kitchener had discussed with Mr. Lloyd George "how the influences which after inspection induce a man to refuse to join the Munitions branch might be best counteracted." The best course would be to transfer the men enrolled to some depôt where the Ministry of Munitions would keep and pay them, until they were detailed for a special factory.

On 8 September Sir R. Brade informed Sir H. Llewellyn Smith that the War Office was practically in agreement with the points raised in the letter of 7 September, except that they expected the Ministry to hold the men who were to be released. A large part of the 3rd Army had already gone abroad, and the rest was on the point of departure. He had always understood that such units should be left alone, at any rate, at first.

General Sclater wrote on 9 September to Sir H. Llewellyn Smith, assuring him that the War Office was doing its utmost to get the men required by the Ministry. He repeated his previous suggestion about transferring them to depôts under the control of the Ministry. "We do not feel we can be responsible for, or sufficiently check, those influences in the Army, which are only natural, when you consider

<sup>1</sup> 19/Gen. No./5456. A.G. 1. Releases. <sup>2</sup> R.C. 05787. <sup>3</sup> R.C. 05787.

the men are recruited to serve in the field." That portion of the 3rd Army, which was not actually under orders to embark, would be open for inspection.

On 14 September Sir H. Llewellyn Smith replied to General Sclater. The issue of the agreed instructions to Commanding Officers and the initiation of visits need not in any way be delayed by the fact that they had not agreed on a plan for detention after enrolment of the men whom the Ministry could not place at once. He appreciated the advantages likely to result if the selected men were removed from influences which might cause them to go back on their undertaking to serve as munition workers. But he was doubtful if the Ministry could organise a dépôt under their own control at which the men could be detained. The attempt would involve delay and the difficulty of providing the necessary discipline or enforcing military law. If the Army Council could not organise such dépôts, the Ministry must take the risk and let the men remain with their units till they were placed, on the understanding, of course, that such men would be detained in this country and held at the disposal of the Ministry. A certificate signed by Lord Kitchener would go far to helping to keep the men faithful to their agreement to take up munitions work.

Three days later General Sclater informed Sir H. Llewellyn Smith that the instructions to the Commands had been sent out. He had himself written and asked the Generals in each Command to give personal attention to the matter, so as to ensure its being carried out efficiently. He would mention the question of the certificate to Lord Kitchener, who was not, however, inclined to adopt the proposal when last before him.

## **VI. Census of Skilled Munition Workers serving in Forces at Home.**

The instructions were issued from the War Office on 16 September. Commanding Officers were informed<sup>1</sup> that, "in view of the great shortage of skilled labour and the urgent need of increasing the supply of skilled men competent to manufacture munitions of war, it is desired that all such men at present serving with His Majesty's forces in the United Kingdom should, so far as possible, be placed at once at the disposal of the Ministry of Munitions for the purpose of expediting and increasing the supply of munitions." With this object a complete register should be made of all men serving at home, skilled in trades necessary for the production of munitions, who were not in the Royal Flying Corps or employed as artificers in the Cavalry, Yeomanry, Royal Artillery, Royal Engineers, Army Service Corps or Army Ordnance Corps. Accordingly a list of these trades was posted at once in conspicuous places, where it could be read by all the men in each unit, and every man skilled in these trades was ordered to give in his name to the orderly room, where nominal rolls were prepared in triplicate of all names given in with the exceptions mentioned above.

<sup>1</sup> 19/Gen. No./5449 (A.G. 1). Releases.

In the meantime the Divisional Officers of Labour Exchanges had been instructed<sup>1</sup> to select, for the purpose of judging the industrial qualifications of each soldier who offered himself as a skilled workman, responsible Labour Exchange officers, who should be either Managers of some standing or assistant Insurance Officers. They would be accompanied by expert registration clerks, and would organise the arrangements for registration, interview the men and certify their capabilities, setting forward as exactly as possible the work for which each soldier was fitted. The investigator should put himself in the position of a works' foreman interviewing an applicant for a situation, and record on the certificate such facts as would be useful to a foreman in coming to a decision.

At the same time the Ministry of Munitions selected Representatives<sup>2</sup> (including several of the Adjudicators and sixteen Members of Parliament) to accompany the investigators on their visits. They were instructed to hold a watching brief on behalf of the skilled investigator and to intervene if they detected the slightest attempt to influence the men against offering themselves as munition workers or to hamper the investigator in the discharge of his duties.

The War Office also arranged<sup>3</sup> that a senior and experienced Staff Officer should accompany each party on its tour of inspection. "Commanding Officers and the Staff Officers deputed by General Officers commanding should give all the assistance in their power to the representatives of the Minister of Munitions in carrying out their task, and should in every possible way encourage all suitable men to come forward for munition work, explaining to them the importance of expediting and increasing the supply of munitions."

On 23 September the tours of inspection began. A list of the units in the 3rd New Army had been handed to an officer of the Ministry on 22 September, and on the following day the Ministry's representative with four skilled investigators visited Aldershot to inspect them. On reporting to the General Officer in command of the 25th Division, he was informed that the War Office Letter of 16 September had not been received. No arrangements consequently had been made. Some of the 25th Division were entraining that evening for the front; the rest would go in a day or two; no one could possibly be released or detained. General Hamilton Gordon, to whom reference was then made, stated he had received a letter of advice that the representative of the Ministry of Munitions was coming, and had telegraphed to prevent him having a useless journey. He added, that it was impossible, pending instructions, to carry out the direction of the Army Council's letter, that skilled men selected should not be allowed to leave the country, since orders for the whole Division to move had previously been given.

On 24 September, Sir H. Llewellyn Smith sent an official letter<sup>4</sup> to the War Office recounting these facts, and added: "The Minister regrets it has not been possible to carry out the scheme agreed upon

<sup>1</sup> C.O. Circ., 1984.    <sup>2</sup> M.W. 43452.    <sup>3</sup> 19/Gen. No./5449.    <sup>4</sup> R.C. 05787.

between the Ministry of Munitions and the War Office, so far as relates to the portion of the 3rd New Army still in the United Kingdom. He proposes shortly to put before the Army Council a scheme for securing the Release from the Colours of skilled munition workers now serving in the Armies in France and Flanders."

Mr. Lloyd George had written<sup>1</sup> on 22 September: "I have already talked over the position with the Prime Minister, and he is insistent that the War Office should help us in every way to get the men back from the Colours."

After this unfortunate beginning, things went better. The whole of the men in each unit were paraded, those on the nominal roll apart from the rest. The Staff Officer explained the conditions under which the men would be released, if required, and invited any suitable men who had not enrolled to come forward in order that their names might be added to the roll. If occasion arose, the Ministry's representative made a speech and emphasised the need of skilled men to make munitions. The investigator then inspected the men enrolled, ascertained by careful enquiry which of them were suitable for the production of munitions, and deleted from the roll those whom he considered unsuitable or who declined to take up munition work. Each man passed as suitable was asked to sign the Form R.C.1, by doing which he undertook to work in any establishment as and when required by the Minister of Munitions. One copy of the roll along with the R.C.1 forms was sent to the Ministry of Munitions; the Staff Officer forwarded the second copy to the War Office; the third copy was retained by the Officer commanding the unit, whose duty it was to see that the men on the roll did not leave their unit or the country, either in drafts or for any other reason, without instructions from the War Office.

About 106,000 men offered themselves under this scheme out of 1,500,000 men paraded and addressed, of whom 40,390 were passed as suitable by the investigators. Half of the selected men were ultimately placed on munitions work. But allocation did not begin until the end of October, and even then for reasons which will be considered later it did not proceed as rapidly as might have been anticipated. Consequently the immediate needs of the Ministry for highly skilled mechanics still remained unsatisfied.

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<sup>1</sup> R.C. 05787.

## CHAPTER III.

### THE BEGINNINGS OF DILUTION.

#### I. Root of Opposition to Dilution.

If more skilled men could not be obtained for munitions from the Army or from commercial work, the only alternative was to make better use of the men available. The various methods by which this was done are popularly known as dilution. The essential feature of them all was the restriction of the skilled man to work which he alone could do. For the rest, complex processes were split into simple operations, skill in which was soon acquired by specialization; fool-proof and other mechanical devices were introduced by which the unskilled were enabled to do work of high accuracy; the semi-skilled were graded upwards according to their ability, untrained boys and women taking their places at the bottom of the ladder; lines of demarcation were removed so that men in similar trades could do each other's work as required. In effect dilution meant the entire reorganization of the workshop with a view to obtaining an output limited only by the number of skilled men available for skilled work and supervision, and by the quantity of the newest machinery obtainable at home and abroad.

The fundamental obstacle to dilution was the opposition of the craft unions. For many years they had been dominated by the fear of a glut in the market, resulting in unemployment and a fall in the standard of living which they tried to secure for their members. To avoid this they had built up a system of rules and customs, written and unwritten, which hampered production. The limitation of the number of apprentices, the insistence that skilled men only should work certain machines, the restriction of output, the regulation of overtime, the exclusion of women and men who had not been initiated into the mysteries of the craft, the sharp demarcation between the operations proper to the various trades, were all founded on the economic half-truth that demand can only be maintained by limiting supply. The fear of a glut was reinforced by the suspicion that employers would cut prices, or substitute cheap labour, or at the best heap up private profits, if these restrictions were relaxed. But that the chief obstruction to dilution did not consist in such suspicions is evident from the fact that, although the Munitions of War Act guaranteed the limitation of profits and the maintenance of rates of wages, the resistance to dilution continued long and obstinate. The workmen feared for the future of their craft. They feared lest, notwithstanding the pledges to restore all changes after the War, so many workpeople would be introduced

by dilution into the engineering trades, who would either prove their capacity to perform much of the "skilled man's work" or render feasible other methods of production not calling for skill, that the old restrictions and customs could not again be enforced, and consequently, the war demand for unlimited output being gone, the tradesmen of ordinary skill would be thrown out of work or compelled to accept a lower standard of living.

## II. Action by Machine Tool Committee.

The policy of dilution was not pressed by the Labour Department until it was clear that neither Muniton Volunteers nor Released Soldiers would go far to meet the shortage of skilled labour. In the meantime the first steps were taken by the Supply Department at Armament Buildings, and the responsibility for diluting skilled labour was placed on the Area Engineer, since he alone had the technical knowledge that was required.<sup>1</sup> But the political difficulties soon proved quite as formidable as the technical, and it became evident that little progress could be made without further negotiations with the Trade Unions.

The machine tool trade was the first branch of Engineering before which definite proposals for dilution were put. The order was natural, since the production of new machinery was the first step in the execution of the munitions programme. But it was unfortunate that the campaign should have been opened in a branch of engineering which the Trade Unions regarded as the peculiar preserve of the skilled tradesman, and on an article the manufacture of which was not limited by the duration of the War. Mr. Lloyd George raised<sup>2</sup> the question of dilution on 15 July at a conference with the machine tool makers, and early in August Mr. Herbert obtained his sanction to urge the employment of female labour in the machine tool trade. The Machine Tool Committee therefore drew up a circular,<sup>3</sup> which on 7 August they sent out to the firms engaged in making machine tools. It was imperative (they said) that all machine tool works should arrange night shifts. The employment of women must not only be encouraged but insisted on. The urgency was great, and all traditions and prejudice against their employment must be swept aside. The Trade Unions had agreed to facilitate it. "Women are already being employed on a large scale in the manufacture of munitions, and with the most satisfactory results. They are not only doing the simple unskilled repetition work, for which they have been employed in times of peace, but they are also being successfully employed on work of a much more difficult character, and making considerable demands both on their intelligence and on their physical strength. While it is no doubt better to employ women in separate shops, when this can be arranged, it is realised that time will not permit of such arrangements being made in most tool shops, and therefore women must be employed in the same shops as the

<sup>1</sup> HIST. REC./R/1121/35.

<sup>2</sup> HIST. REC./R/1700/3.

<sup>3</sup> M.W. 58424/29.—This was known as M.T. Circular 40.

men, and if necessary among the men. . . . In each shop where women are employed a responsible woman to act as forewoman and general supervisor should be provided. She should not only have some knowledge of the work, but she should also be the kind of woman to whom the women should go for help and assistance in difficulties." Each employer would realise best how to employ women in his shops, but the following suggestions were offered as to obvious duties which they could perform :—painting, shop sweeping, storekeeping, time booking, drilling, capstan work, gear cutting, simple milling, grinding and lathe operations of a repetition character, and some of the simpler fitting operations. "It must not be expected that trained women can be found. They must be looked on as willing to learn, and must be patiently taught in just the same way as apprentices. . . . The hours of employment for women should be shorter than those fixed for men." The circular concluded by asking for a return of the number of women already employed other than those engaged in clerical work, and inviting suggestions or information concerning the employment of women. It was signed by all the members of the Committee, Messrs. A. Herbert, W. B. Lang, J. W. S. Asquith, W. F. Clark, W. D. Ford Smith and C. H. Churchill. These names naturally carried great weight with employers who doubted the practicability of employing women on a large scale in engineering, but at the same time they did not allay the workmen's fear that dilution was a device for bringing cheap labour into the machine tool trade and undermining the position of the skilled man.

### III. Conferences on Dilution with National Advisory Committee.

In the course of August officers of the Ministry held a series of conferences with the National Advisory Committee in order to press home the necessity of dilution, explore the difficulties in its way from the workmen's point of view, and devise some scheme for joint action. The first conference took place on 6 August, when the Committee met Mr. Herbert and Mr. Lang accompanied by Mr. Allingham, of Messrs. Hans Renold, Ltd., Manchester.<sup>1</sup> Mr. Allingham explained how his firm had succeeded in accelerating output by scientific management and new devices for manipulating automatic machinery. He had found the Trade Unions quite willing to discuss improved methods and to recommend their adoption, provided that rates were not cut. Their officials were welcome to come into the works at any time and see that the workmen were not being driven or exploited. No limit was set to earnings; the system had been working three years; not a single complaint had been made against it by workmen or trade union. Mr. Binns, organizing district delegate of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, confirmed Mr. Allingham's statements. The invariable fairness with which Hans Renold treated their employeecs predisposed the Engineers to regard with favour any innovation proposed by the firm. After considerable discussion the

<sup>1</sup> N.A.C. Minutes, 27.

following minute<sup>1</sup> was sent to the Minister signed by Mr. Henderson, Mr. Mosses and Mr. Herbert :—

“ In order to secure immediate increase in supplies, and to avoid unnecessary national expenditure on plant, it is resolved to suggest the appointment of a small committee composed equally of labour representatives and of engineers having special knowledge of output. The committee would formulate plans for a systematic endeavour to increase output in such a way as to guard against unfair treatment of the workers; and should have the necessary powers to ensure that its recommendations receive proper attention from employers and trade unions. Mr. Allingham should be one of the four members of the committee.”

On 12 August Mr. Henderson, Mr. Brownlie and Mr. Mosses met Dr. Addison, Mr. Herbert and Mr. Wolff to consider a proposal to bring a large number of women into the manufacture of munitions and machine tools.<sup>2</sup> Dr. Addison stated that the Minister wished to appoint a committee to deal with the whole question of introducing female labour into the engineering trade. Mr. Herbert said that additional labour was imperatively required for the manufacture of machine tools. The chief difficulty was anticipated from the employers; the best way of dealing with them was to send out inspectors, who would explain what was being done by other firms, where women were employed, and endeavour to break down the prejudice which undoubtedly existed against the introduction of female labour. Mr. Brownlie stated that this question had been under the consideration of the Council of the Amalgamated Engineers, who had decided to leave it in the hands of their local committees, subject to the condition that they as a Society had accepted the Treasury Agreement and recognised that they were bound by its provisions. He did not anticipate any trouble from their members, if female labour was largely introduced into the engineering shops. The National Advisory Committee expressed the view that no complication would ensue from this innovation, provided that the Treasury Agreement was observed; in their opinion the question of wages during probation should be a matter for local arrangement. It was decided to suggest a small mixed committee to carry out the further employment of women in machine tool and munition factories, of which Mr. Brownlie and Mr. Mosses should be members.

On 18 August Mr. Glynn West met the National Advisory Committee and emphasized the shortage of skilled men<sup>3</sup>; those we had must be utilized to the fullest extent; many firms had put skilled turners on shell work, which was a waste of good material; these men must come off the lathes and act as supervisors for unskilled men. But what wages should be paid to these untrained substitutes? In his opinion, since this was a new branch of industry for all but some half-a-dozen firms, the same rates should be paid as were paid to workmen of a similar class in the nearest district where shell

<sup>1</sup> M.W. 37173.

<sup>2</sup> N.A.C. Minutes, 28.

<sup>3</sup> N.A.C. Minutes, 30.

manufacture was carried on, 24s. to 28s. a week for unskilled men. But some of the local trade union representatives maintained that rates should be determined by the type of machine, not by the class of work done on it. He wished to know whether paragraphs 4 and 5 of Schedule II. of the Munitions Act<sup>1</sup> meant that the same rates must be paid to the unskilled workmen, who had to perform merely automatic processes, as had been paid to the skilled men who now acted as their supervisors. He added that the various operations connected with the manufacture of shell were invariably done on piece or premium bonus. The National Advisory Committee were not prepared to give an opinion on this question, since the Trade Unions concerned were trying to arrange a deputation to the Minister to discuss the whole subject.

On 27 August Sir H. Llewellyn Smith informed<sup>2</sup> the National Advisory Committee that the War Muniton Volunteer scheme had failed. Up to 25 August 102,027 volunteers had enrolled. For some of them there was no demand, but a very large proportion were found to be already engaged on Government work, or since the time of their enrolment had been placed on such work. The shortage of skilled men already exceeded 15,000; and within a few months the deficiency must be most acute. The number of Volunteers actually placed up to 25 August was 3,270; and there was little reason for hoping that this proportion would be materially increased, in view of the growing difficulties of effecting any transfers at all. "It seems clear that the scheme will not suffice to overcome the inherent difficulties of the situation, and that other measures are therefore necessary."

On 31 August Dr. Addison attended a meeting<sup>3</sup> of the National Advisory Committee and made a statement concerning the labour requirements of the near future. 80,000 skilled workmen would eventually be needed to man the factories in course of construction, of whom 35,000 would be required by October. In addition they must have a large number of unskilled workers, but they did not expect any difficulty in getting them. He then reviewed the various ways by which the skilled men might be obtained. Of the available War Muniton Volunteers at least half had already been transferred. In order to release skilled men from the Colours, Lord Kitchener was willing that direct communication should be opened with each home unit; but not more than 6,000 men could be obtained in that way. Then there was the employment of unskilled and semi-skilled men on work now done by skilled men. The local trade union officials had not yet realised the import of the Treasury Agreement in Wales, where skilled turners were still working on shells and unskilled men excluded. Lastly, there was the scheme for employing women. Dr. Addison thought the best way to effect this was to bring about an agreement between the Trade Unions and the employers regarding wages during probation or training and when the women had become proficient. This was, in his opinion, largely a matter for local arrange-

<sup>1</sup> See p. 105.

<sup>2</sup> N.A.C. Minutes, 33.

<sup>3</sup> N.A.C. Minutes, 32.

ment. Afterwards they might undertake a campaign to extend and popularize the employment of female labour in the manufacture of munitions. The dilution of skilled labour was the only way out of the present difficulties. The great necessity of the moment was to impress on the workmen the need of working up to the provisions of the Treasury Agreement and of facilitating the employment of women. Mr. Henderson thought that the local conferences which had been abandoned, with trade union officials and shop stewards, would have done much to achieve Dr. Addison's objects. As an alternative Dr. Addison suggested that the local advisory boards should be brought to London and the Minister asked to address them. In the meantime it was decided to request Mr. Lloyd George to address the Trades Union Congress on the need for an increased and accelerated output of munitions.

#### IV. Local Opposition to Dilution.

While these discussions were going on between the Ministry and the National Advisory Committee and every day made it clearer that dilution only could make good the requirements of the National Factories and the demands of the munitions programme, events had occurred in the country which showed that, in spite of the Treasury Agreement and the Munitions of War Act, obstinate local resistance would be made to the introduction of female labour and to the grading upwards of semi-skilled men.

On 6 August the National Advisory Committee had received a communication<sup>1</sup> from Woolwich Arsenal, stating that on account of the shortage of toolfitters it had been decided to advance some of their semi-skilled workmen, but trouble was apprehended. The Committee agreed to reply to Sir F. Donaldson that they were prepared to observe the Treasury Agreement in every particular and to ask the Council of the Amalgamated Engineers whether this alleged objection was within their knowledge and had their sanction. The Council referred the matter to their district committee, who resolved<sup>2</sup> "that we refuse to entertain the proposal to allow the introduction of semi-skilled men on work now done by fully qualified mechanics, as it is not proved there is the shortage claimed."

In accordance with the instructions from the Machine Tool Committee, Messrs. J. Lang & Sons, Johnstone, one of the principal firms in the country making shell lathes, proposed to introduce female labour.<sup>3</sup> They therefore gave notice of their intention to their employees, as the second schedule of the Munitions of War Act prescribed, and also enquired how the Amalgamated Engineers would regard such action. On 27 August the firm met their shop stewards accompanied by the district delegate of the Engineers and by Mr. Gorman, a member of the Executive Council. Mr. Gorman intimated that it was the intention of the Council of the Engineers to oppose strenuously the introduction of female labour into the workshops, where engineering

<sup>1</sup> N.A.C. Minutes, 27.

<sup>2</sup> A.S.E. *Journal*, Oct., 1915, p. 14.

<sup>3</sup> A.S.E. *Journal*, Sept., 1915, p. 19.

M.W. 52265.

or toolmaking was carried on apart from the production of shells and fuses. The local committee therefore decided<sup>1</sup> "That no woman shall be put to work a lathe, and if this was done the men would know how to protect their rights."

The Ministry has been severely criticised for not forcing an issue on this decision without delay. Undoubtedly if drastic action had succeeded without causing resentment, dilution would have been carried out in the West of Scotland six months earlier than it was. For the employers regarded this as a test case. When they saw the men defying the instructions of the Ministry with impunity they refused to risk any similar and probably fruitless trouble in their own works.<sup>2</sup> Further, the apparent inaction of the Ministry encouraged the factious opposition to the Munitions of War Act, which became grave and menacing later. On the other hand, the Ministry was placed at a disadvantage by the fact that Messrs. Lang had not posted any Rules under section 4 (5) of the Act, by which effect could be given by a Munitions Tribunal to section 4 (3), which provided that all rules, practices and customs tending to restrict production and employment should be suspended in controlled establishments. But the main reason for delay was no doubt the hope that further negotiations with the Trade Unions might lead to more reasonable action on their part, and the fear lest a serious strike might cause bitter and widespread resentment, which would effectually prevent the men from doing their best during the all-important months that lay ahead. It was becoming clear also that dilution involved difficult questions concerning the wages of women and semi-skilled men, which were not adequately met by the provisions relating to wages in the second schedule of the Munitions of War Act. Those provisions required authoritative interpretation and extension by the Ministry before much progress could be expected. For the notion that the adjustment of wages consequent upon dilution could be left for local arrangement soon proved illusory, in view of the temper of the workmen in the chief industrial centres, and the fact that the prohibition of strikes and the institution of leaving certificates had rendered local negotiations between Trade Unions and Employers' Associations barren if not dangerous.

#### **V. Mr. Lloyd George's Speech at the Trades Union Congress. 9 September, 1915.**

On 9 September Mr. Lloyd George spoke<sup>3</sup> at the Trades Union Congress at Bristol. "With you," he said, "victory is assured; without you our cause is lost." The story of the last twelve months showed what organized Labour could do in this war. By the end of September, 1914, the German armies were checked. They sustained an overwhelming defeat in France, Russia was advancing against them towards the Carpathians. "That is not the case to-day. Why? The German workmen came in. Organized Labour in Germany

<sup>1</sup> A.S.E. *Journal*, Oct., 1915, p. 13.

<sup>2</sup> M.W. 53193.

<sup>3</sup> See *Trades Union Congress Annual Report*, 1915, pp. 352-362.

prepared to take the field. They worked, and worked quietly, persistently, conscientiously without stint or strike, without restriction, for months and months, through the autumn, through the winter, through the spring. Then came the terrible avalanche of shot and shell which broke the great Russian armies and drove them back. That was the victory of the German workmen. That German advance in Russia was the victory of German trade unionism."

The War had become a conflict between the mechanics of Germany and Austria and the mechanics of Great Britain and France. It was a war of material. We had plenty of valour. No army that ever entered a battlefield showed more courage than the armies of Britain in France, in Flanders and in the Dardanelles. But we must back them up. "We must make, we are making, the most prodigious efforts to increase our war material during the next few months in order to give our gallant fellows fair play in the field. We have set up 16 national arsenals. We are constructing 11 more." To man these and other munition works 80,000 more skilled men were needed, and 200,000 unskilled men and women.

"This country at the present moment is not doing its best. It is not doing its utmost, and it is almost entirely a labour problem, and you can alone assist. . . . To begin with, the machinery in this country which can be employed for war materials is not working night and day. You have only got 15 per cent. of the machines which you could use for the turning out of rifles, cannon and shells working night shifts. If you could get plenty of labour to make these machines go night and day—ah, just think of the lives that could be saved."

How was that to be done? There would not be enough labour for the task on hand, if every skilled workman in the kingdom were employed on it. Diluting skilled labour with unskilled did not mean turning out the skilled workman in order to put a cheaper workman in his place. There was plenty of work for the skilled workman. There were not enough skilled workmen to go round. But highly skilled workmen with years of training were doing work which could just as easily be done by those who had only had a few weeks' or a few days' training. They must leave such work to the unskilled, and reserve the highly skilled for work which nobody could do except those who had great experience, training and skill. We could not equip our armies in time unless organized Labour was prepared to assist in that way. They must suspend during the war all restrictions which made it difficult to make the best use of skilled labour by employing unskilled under skilled direction for all work for which highly skilled labour was not absolutely indispensable.

Again, trade unionists could help by suspending during the War all practices and customs which had the effect of preventing men from turning out as much work as their skill and strength permitted. Lastly, there must be no stoppage in essential work during the period of the War.