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SECRET.

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(Also C.I.D. No. 206-C.)

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IMPERIAL CONFERENCE 1923.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF DOMINION AIR FORCES.

INTRODUCTION.

Note by the Secretary of State for Air.

THE following memorandum prepared by the Air Staff is circulated in continuation of the corresponding paper (C.I.D. No. 132-C),* prepared for the Conference in February 1921.

It will be noticed that this memorandum deals at some length with the present position of the Royal Air Force, and the scheme of expansion that has been authorised by the Imperial Government. It was thought that the representatives of the Dominion Governments might desire to be put in possession of the latest developments in the Royal Air Force, with a view to seeing how far and in what way it is possible to devise a scheme of co-operation between the various Governments of the Empire. I hope, therefore, that the paper will form a basis of discussion, and will lead to an interchange of views between representatives of the Dominions and the Air Staff.

The Air Staff paper deals almost exclusively with the problems of military aviation. It may, however, be noted that I have already circulated to the Economic Conference a paper (I.E.C. (23)/4) upon the Imperial aspects of civil aviation, certain of which, as for instance the carrying of mails and geographical survey, are already being developed to some extent by the air forces of the Empire.

S. H.

MEMORANDUM BY THE AIR STAFF.

Preparation in Peace.

It is an essential to success in air operations that the forces employed against the enemy should be based on a secure foundation of peace organisation. Air forces cannot be extemporised. A practical illustration of this is furnished by the experience of the Americans on their entry into the war in 1917. Referring to the matter, the Chief of the United States Air Staff wrote :—

“Owing to the many technical problems which had to be solved, to the many difficulties connected with the procurement of equipment which had to be overcome and to the considerable time that it takes for training, it has been shown that it takes longer to place an efficient air service in the field than is the case with any other arm of the Service. In all planning for the future this fact must be given full consideration.”†

2. Adequate preparation in peace is therefore essential to the success of air operations in modern war, the conditions of which make it probable that great events will immediately follow, if they do not actually precede, a formal declaration of hostilities. If organisations have to be improvised, staffs created, aircraft and equipment provided and plans matured after the outbreak of war, the value of air co-operation, however willingly and enthusiastically given, will be greatly lessened.

Policy. Royal Air Force.

3. Since the war the Air Force has been reduced to the absolute minimum compatible with the immediate needs of the Navy and the maintenance of units for overseas garrisons.

* Also Paper No. E. 7.

† Final Report of the Chief of the Air Staff, American Expeditionary Force, February 15, 1921.

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