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S E C R E T.

W.P.(42) 244.

9th June, 1942.

COPY NO. 5

WAR CABINET.

CENSORSHIP.

Memorandum by the Minister of Information.

Reference was recently made to two cases in which it was alleged that the Censorship had been at fault. The first case was the failure of the B.B.C. to stop Lord Wedgwood's broadcast to the United States. The second was an alleged 'break' of news about the Russian negotiations.

2. Lord Wedgwood's broadcast was not, of course, arranged by the B.B.C. but by an American broadcasting company. Nevertheless the censorship of the script was the duty of the Censorship unit which the B.B.C. maintains at Broadcasting House. There is no justification for the failure of the censor concerned to refer the script of Lord Wedgwood's broadcast to higher authority. He has been dismissed.

3. There has not been any very bad "break" of news in London regarding the Russian negotiations. No English newspaper has published a word about them. The "break" to which reference was made came from Washington and the cause of it has since been discovered to be the failure of the State Department to impart any instructions concerning the negotiations to the Censorship authorities. Since this was rectified there has been no further leakage.

4. The item of news complained of was transmitted to London by Reuters and submitted to our own censors here before distribution in this country. Some parts of it were deleted but others were allowed to pass. Subsequently the deputy Chief Censor on duty thought that he had better report the whole message to one of the Foreign Office advisers, who considered it necessary to "kill" it even though it had already been passed on to the news tapes. In consequence it received no publication in this country. I am not concerned to question the wisdom of the Foreign Office in taking this action. But if the censor had possessed a little more background knowledge of the situation he would not have made the initial error.

The moral of all this is that the Chief Censor should be given sufficient information about important diplomatic developments to enable him to instruct his officers properly. In present circumstances he frequently receives first news of this kind not from the Foreign Office but from press correspondents themselves. Some correspondents are regularly getting information from the foreign Embassies which is considered to be too secret to impart to the Chief Censor. So long as this state of affairs continues the censors cannot be blamed if sometimes through ignorance significant diplomatic news is allowed to leak out.

The difficulty cannot be solved by arranging for the censor to refer all stories about political matters to the Foreign Office news adviser as a matter of course. Censorship by this double process would be wasteful and dilatory. It would cause endless conflicts with the Press, who have already seen the censorship rules strained to breaking point to meet Foreign Office requirements. Nor would such a practice be consistent with the maintenance of the proper responsibility of the Censorship to interpret and apply the rules the Government has laid down for them.

B.B.

9th June, 1942.