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Byrnes Lashes the Home Front Toward All-Out Effort for War

Grave Developments Abroad Echoed in Manpower Crackdown, Food Restrictions, Racing Ban

Three months ago, Congress changed James F. Byrnes's title to Director of War Mobilization and Reconversion. Last week Byrnes forgot reconversion. The war news made it obvious that the home front needed a touch of the whip. This is how he lashed it:

- To save gasoline, tires, and absentee man-hours in war plants Byrnes directed the Office of Defense Transportation, the War Production Board, and the War



Hutson will plan for peace, **Clay** (right) will work on Byrnes's war programs

Manpower Commission to apply whatever pressure was necessary to halt horse racing by Jan. 3 (see page 60).

- To save food for the growing demands of the armies two of Byrnes's subordinate agencies, the Office of Price Administration and the War Food Administration, put rationing back to the stringent levels of early 1943. The point value of butter was increased, and nearly all the non-rationed meats and canned vegetables went on the rationing list again. At the time the orders were issued, meat supplies were declining rapidly and civilian stocks of sugar, butter, and canned vegetables were extremely low (see page 31).

- To increase arms production Byrnes put the first real teeth in manpower controls. He directed the WPB to use its life-or-death power over all industry to shunt workers from nonessential jobs to critical munitions production.

Nothing Else Matters: For three years government officials have suggested use of WPB priority powers to enforce the rulings of other agencies. But Donald M. Nelson, former WPB chairman, and John Lord O'Brian, former general counsel, steadily resisted. O'Brian, who resigned on Dec. 20 to return to private practice, especially opposed the

proposal. He held that the Second War Powers Act does not cover such indirect application of priority controls.

Byrnes has decided that it does. Under his manpower order the WPB will shape industry's hiring to war needs by juggling priorities and allocations for important materials. If a firm hires or retains more men than the WMC labor ceilings permit, it may lose its right to WPB-controlled manufacturing materials and may be denied fuel, tires, or other scarce commodities.

He made clear that, while most businesses have complied voluntarily with WMC rules, he is "unwilling to ask for a voluntary acceptance of ceilings by the many without being prepared to take positive measures [against the few]."

Thus from now on, nothing matters but the war. The government's moves of the last three weeks have finally resolved the argument over military vs. civilian production. First the government had frozen reconversion, then it had tightened draft regulations for men over 26. Last week Washington took the last step possible short of national service legislation.

Byrnes thinks it probably is too late for such a law. Clear-cut penalties for violation of labor ceilings might yet be needed, but he will try to do it with his WPB-sanctions program.

The Assistant Cabinet: For the new austerity, Byrnes, the "Assistant President," has assembled his general staff. These men, little-known to most citizens, will be his chief planners in war mobilization and in reconversion. Two stand out as the most important:

- Maj. Gen. Lucius D. Clay, Deputy Director for War Programs. Son of a one-time senator from Georgia, Clay is a former West Point engineering teacher. As principal assistant to supply chief Lt. Gen. Brehon B. Somervell, he has been largely responsible for the Army Service Forces procurement program. Byrnes had to make a personal plea to get Clay released from the Army.

- J. B. Hutson, Deputy Director for Agriculture. He will turn most of his attention to switching crop production to peacetime schedules. Already president of the Commodity Credit Corp., Hutson is a Department of Agriculture career man who entered that service in 1924. Associates say he is capable of coping with tough farm tasks.

- William Haber comes to Byrnes from the War Manpower Commission where the saying was: "If you want to find out anything about manpower, ask Bill Haber." A behind-the-scenes adviser to Paul V. McNutt, and on leave as professor of economics at the University of Michigan, he has held a series of government administrative jobs on the National Youth Administration, the WPA, and other relief agencies in Michigan. He was a labor adviser to Hart, Schaffner & Marx.

- Fred Searls Jr., just back from a United States Army Air Forces job in England, has worked for Byrnes before. As a special assistant in the Office of War

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Mobilization, he scanned the war production program with a view to saving taxpayers' money. He is credited with having saved several million dollars. He served at the War Production Board too, where he was assistant to Ferdinand Eberstadt, who resigned Feb. 16, 1943 when the military lost one of the first battles for closer control of the home-front effort.

● Thomas C. Blaisdell Jr. is a figure man and will go on being one for Byrnes. He will head a planning and statistical staff, drawing largely on other government agencies for his technical help. Byrnes does not like large staffs and will try to get along with 50 people at most. Blaisdell has been in various government administrative posts since 1934. He is an ex-instructor in economics at Columbia University.

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