

Hansard, Volume 399: Debated on Wednesday 10th May 1944. British Aid to Russia.

[Hansard is an edited verbatim record of what was said in Parliament. It also includes records of votes and written ministerial statements. The report is published daily covering the preceding day, and is followed by a bound final version.]

To fully appreciate the scale of this help to Russia and put it into perspective we need to understand that £1 in 1944 was the equivalent of £37 in 2025. (*Bank of England*)

The following Question stood upon the Order Paper in the name of Colonel LYONS:

To ask the Prime Minister whether, in view of the information which has been published as to the supplies of material and munitions of war from the U.S.A. to Russia, he will now publish detailed particulars of the assistance rendered by Great Britain and the Empire countries in this direction.

The Prime Minister

I am circulating to-day, in the OFFICIAL REPORT, [*This report is set out on page 2 below*] a full statement on the materials and munitions of war supplied to Russia by Great Britain and the Empire countries. The House may, however, like to know that between 1st October, 1941, and 31st March, 1944, we have supplied to the Soviet Union 5,031 tanks, of which 1,223 were from Canada. We have supplied 6,778 aircraft, including 2,672 aircraft sent from the United States of America. These latter were sent on United States Lend-Lease to the Soviet Union as part of the British commitment in exchange for the supply of British aircraft to United States Forces in the European theatre. We have also sent over £80,000,000 worth of raw materials, foodstuffs, machinery, industrial plant, medical supplies anti comforts.

I need hardly remind the House that a considerable proportion of these supplies has been fought through to Russia along the Arctic route. These operations have been under the general direction of successive Commanders-in-Chief, Home Fleet, and almost all losses of warships have fallen upon the Royal Navy. In merchant ships, on the other hand, the Allied Nations, and particularly the merchant ships of the United States of America, have borne the heavier loss. Many brave men have fallen into icy waters, but our Russian Allies have had some of the help and comfort they needed and deserved. I should also add that in making this statement I am merely responding to a wish that the facts should be published, as they ought to be. I am not in the slightest degree boasting invidiously about our efforts as compared with those of our Ally, the United States, nor making out any counter-claims against the heroism and glorious military exploits of the Soviet Armies.

Mr. Mothers

Mr. Speaker, do we understand that the Prime Minister is telling us what has been sent purely on Government account, and that the subscriptions raised in this country for sending material to Russia are excluded from that statement?

The Prime Minister

I am not quite sure of the form of the statement, but it is known that a very large sum has been subscribed by vast numbers of people in this country for medical comforts and supplies. I could give that figure separately if I were asked to do so on a future occasion.

Mr. McGovern

Can the right hon. Gentleman state whether Russia has given in exchange any materials to this country?

The Prime Minister

The ports from which it was possible to export have of course been very much congested by the movement of military traffic and there has not been the opportunity to send all the quantities of lumber, which is the natural export from Russia to this country, from those ports which the Russians were very ready to send, but I am sure they have done their best to fill the returning ships.

[The **OFFICIAL REPORT** that the Prime Minister spoke about in his reply earlier was published later that day and is set out below.]

Following is the statement:

I am glad of this opportunity to make known details of the very substantial contribution made by the U.K. in aid of our Soviet Allies. Not only has this aid been considerable, but it has only been possible to furnish it at heavy cost in lives of our seamen and ships which have been lost on North Russian convoys.

The great bulk of these supplies have been furnished directly by or manufactured in the United Kingdom. Some of these items contain a proportion, small but unascertainable, of raw materials or component parts which we ourselves have received on Lend-Lease terms from the United States, and without which it would not have been possible to make these supplies available to Soviet Union.

The figures also include some supplies made available to the United Kingdom under Canadian Mutual Aid and some procured from Canada by the U.K., partly with the help of the Canadian Billion Dollar Gift. For the help thus given I should like to take this opportunity of expressing His Majesty's Government's appreciation. Since 1st July, 1943, supplies from Canada have also been going forward by direct arrangement between Canada and the U.S.S.R. and are not included in the present statement.

A list is appended below, setting out the main items despatched to U.S.S.R. from 1st October, 1941, to 31st March, 1944. Owing to the wide variety of their nature, specific reference has not been made to all categories of supplies, but this list shows the scale on which aid to U.S.S.R. has been going forward over the last two and half years.

SUPPLIES TO U.S.S.R. DESPATCHED BETWEEN 1 ST OCTOBER, 1941, TO 31ST MARCH, 1944.

1. MILITARY SUPPLIES.

(a) *Armaments and Military Stores.*

- *Tanks:* Since October, 1941, 5,031 tanks have been supplied, of which 1,223 were Canadian built.
- *Vehicles* (includes lorries and ambulances): 4,020.
- *Machinery lorries:* 216.

Bren Carriers and Starters and Chargers: 2,463 (including 1,348 from Canada).

Motor Cycles: 1,706.

Weapons:

- 800 P.I.A.T., with ammunition.
- 103 Thompson sub-machine guns.
- 636 2-pdr. anti-tank guns.
- 96 6-pdr. anti-tank guns.
- 3,200 Boys anti-tank rifles.

- 2,487 Bren guns.
- 581 7.92 m.m. Besa guns.

Ammunition:

- 85,000 rounds P.I.A.T.
- 19,346,000 rounds 45-in, machine gun.
- 2,591,000 rounds 2-pdr. anti-tank gun.
- 409,000 rounds 6-pdr. anti-tank gun.
- 1,761,000 rounds 55 in. Boys anti-tank rifle.
- 75,134,000 rounds 303-in. rifle.
- 51,211,000 rounds 7.92 mm. tank gun, Besa.

G.L. Equipment:

- (a) Mark II: 302 sets.
- (b) Mark III: 15 sets British; 29 sets Canadian.

Cable: 30,227 miles telephone cable.

(b) Naval Supplies:

- 9 Mine-sweeping trawlers.
- 3 Motor mine-sweepers.
- 102 Asdics.
- 3,006 Mines.
- 50 Vickers 130 mm. guns.
- 603 Anti-aircraft machine guns.
- 40 Submarine Batteries

(c) Aircraft (Fighters).—Total despatched 6,770 aircraft, including 2,672 aircraft sent from U.S.A. These were sent on United States Lend/Lease to U.S.S.R., as part of the British commitment, in exchange for a supply of British aircraft to U.S. forces in the European theatre.

2. RAW MATERIALS, FOODSTUFFS, MACHINERY AND INDUSTRIAL PLANT.

(a) Raw Materials.—The greater part of these supplies have been bought from Empire sources. Over the last 2½ years we have sent:

- 30,000 tons of aluminium from Canada [£3,038,000].
- 2,000 tons of aluminium from United Kingdom [£720,000].
- 27,000 tons of copper from Canada [£1,431,000].
- 10,000 tons of copper from United Kingdom [£620,000].
- \$4,672,000 worth of Industrial Diamonds, mainly from African production [£1,168,000].
- 80,924 tons of jute from India [£3,687,000].
- 81,423 tons of rubber from the Far East and Ceylon [£9,911,000].
- 8,550 tons of sisal from British East Africa [£194,000].
- 3,300 tons of graphite from Ceylon [£160,000].
- 28,050 tons of tin from Malaya and United Kingdom [£7,774,000].
- 29,610 tons of wool from Australia and New Zealand [£5,521,000].

TOTAL VALUE of these and other raw materials: £39,115,000.

(*b*) *Foodstuffs*.—These include: Tea from Ceylon and India; Cocoa beans, palm oil and palm kernels from West Africa; groundnuts from India; cocoanut oil from Ceylon; pepper and spices from India, Ceylon and British West Indies.

TOTAL VALUE of all foodstuffs supplied: £7,223,000.

(*c*) *Machine Tools, Industrial Plant and Machinery*.—These form the principal direct contribution from United Kingdom production to civil supplies for the U.S.S.R. Since the entry of Russia into the war, the following have been provided:

- Machine Tools— £218,000.
- Power Plant— £4,250,000.
- Electrical Equipment— £3,314,000. Miscellaneous Industrial Equipment— £1,980,000.
- Various types of Machinery— £3,019,000 (e.g. Telephone equipment, food processing plant, textile machinery, port and salvage equipment).

TOTAL VALUE OF (*c*): £20,781,000.

GRAND TOTAL OF CIVIL STORES MADE AVAILABLE TO U.S.S.R. BY THE UNITED KINGDOM FROM ALL SOURCES: £77,185,000.

3. *MEDICAL SUPPLIES AND COMFORTS*.—The public have contributed some of the funds for these supplies. Since October, 1941, £3,047,725 has been spent through charitable organisations on surgical and medical items and clothing. In addition, His Majesty's Government have made a grant of £2,500,000 for clothing, nearly all of which has been spent.

There was a very strange dichotomy taking place in Britain. On the one hand the British public was constantly being assailed with the National Savings message that they need to 'Lend to Defend the Right to be Free', so the government could spend their savings on desperately needed war materials and weapons for Britain's armed forces, when at the same time the government was sending these weapons shipments to Russia. What made it doubly strange was that that National Savings and these 'gifts' to Russia, were actually celebrated by everyone, the government, the press and the public, with no dismay shown at the obvious contradiction involved.

Britain also gave Lend Lease materials to the United States, but that is another story.