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FOOD AND AGRICULTURE
IN BRITAIN

1939-45



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STANFORD UNIVERSITY

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FOOD AND AGRICULTURE
IN BRITAIN
1939-45

Aspects of Wartime Control

By
R. J. HAMMOND

Stanford University Press

STANFORD, CALIFORNIA

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FOOD RESEARCH INSTITUTE

Established at Stanford University, Stanford, California, in 1921,
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STANFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, STANFORD, CALIFORNIA

PUBLISHED IN GREAT BRITAIN, INDIA, AND PAKISTAN BY GEOFFREY CUMBERLEGE,
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, LONDON, BOMBAY, AND KARACHI

THE BAKER AND TAYLOR COMPANY, HILLSIDE, NEW JERSEY

HENRY M. SNYDER & COMPANY, INC., 440 FOURTH AVENUE, NEW YORK 16

W. S. HALL & COMPANY, 457 MADISON AVENUE, NEW YORK 22

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Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 54-8441

DIRECTOR'S PREFACE

This book is the seventh to appear in the Food Research Institute's projected series of some twenty volumes designed to illuminate the complex aspects of food, agriculture, and World War II. It is one of a group of studies analyzing wartime management of food and agriculture in various important regions of the world. Books earlier published in this group have dealt with wartime events in German-occupied portions of Europe, in Japan, in India, in Australia and New Zealand, and in the Union of South Africa.

The author, Mr. R. J. Hammond, is exceptionally qualified to pass in review the wartime events in Britain. He lived through them, and observed what occurred with the eye of the trained economic historian, knowing that it would become his task, in the course of time, to record and interpret what the nation experienced. Part of the record of events and actions he has set forth in his official capacity as Historian of Food Policy for the United Kingdom Official War Histories. In the present volume he has chosen even more strongly to emphasize analysis and interpretation. The book is addressed to and will be found especially rewarding by those whose concern is mainly to appraise, philosophically and in perspective, the decisions which governments in the midst of war find it necessary or expedient to take on pressing problems of food supply and agricultural production. The Institute, seeking such appraisal of world-wide scope, considers itself fortunate to have been able to arrange for Mr. Hammond's probing and significant analysis of British developments.

Grateful acknowledgment is made to the Rockefeller Foundation for a grant of funds that made possible the preparation and publication of this work. The Foundation is in no way responsible for the treatment of the subject. The final responsibility, in general and in detail, rests with the author himself.

M. K. BENNETT
Director

STANFORD, CALIFORNIA
September 1954

FOREWORD

This book owes its character in part to being a by-product, so to speak, of a larger work of research—the detailed account of wartime food policy and administration, at present in course of publication in the United Kingdom official series of war histories. It is by no means a mere summary of the latter; an effort has been made to conceive a new work, appropriate to the different scale of treatment that could be adopted just because the evidence in support of it would be published elsewhere. Were it not for that fact, I would have felt it necessary to write at greater length on the present occasion. Those, in particular, who wish to study the statistical record are referred to the following publications of H.M. Government: *Statistical Digest of the War* (History of the Second World War, U.K. Civil Series, H.M.S.O. and Longmans, Green and Co., 1951); and Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, *Agricultural Statistics, 1939–44*, Parts I and II (H.M.S.O., 1948 and 1949).

The book has been given the subtitle *Aspects of Wartime Control*, by way of disclaiming any pretense of completeness. The subject is so vast that it would take a lifetime to explore, and even the official history will have to leave many minor commodity controls, for instance, untouched. Research into certain major commodities is at present incomplete, and I have preferred to omit discussion of certain topics, e.g., the Ministry of Food's overseas purchasing operations, rather than base it on material not yet sufficiently studied. I am in any case inclined to think that the Ministry trading activities do not lend themselves to historical analysis and generalization.

The chapters on the food production campaign (3 and 5) were written without access to the records of the Agricultural Departments, since my official assignment did not cover food production. They may, therefore, be thought to have a slight "Ministry of Food flavor," though bias in the sources has, so far as possible, been allowed for. Although I claim no technical knowledge of agriculture, I hope that undignified errors have been avoided. The remainder of the book is based almost wholly on the same unpublished material as the official history; with the exception of one or two passages, however, it contains no matters of fact not included in the latter. Acknowledgment is due once again, therefore, to those officials, too numerous

to mention by name, who by helping with one book, have necessarily helped with the other. Needless to say, neither the Ministry of Food nor any other British Government Department has any sort of responsibility for the views expressed.

Just as the second Ministry of Food owed much to its pioneer predecessor, so the present study is indebted to the works of Collier and Lord Beveridge—even more than the numerous quotations suggest. Each could illuminate a whole subject by an aside—indeed, I have sometimes found it hard to repress a grievance at finding myself so often and so inevitably anticipated in the *mot juste*. To Lord Beveridge I owe also the quotation on the half-title page that I have taken as a motto (*British Food Control*, p. 28); it is the latest debt in a long series, for it was in his day at the London School of Economics that I was trained as an economic historian and so may claim to be in the authentic tradition.

Last but not least, thanks are due to P. Stanley King, of the Food Research Institute, for help in seeing the book through the press.

R. J. H.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
1. THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND	3
World War I and the reaction from control, 3—Food plans for another war, 9—Security food stocks, 13—Creating a second Ministry of Food, 15	
2. THE ESTABLISHMENT OF CONTROL, 1939/40	19
The beginning of rationing, 19—Shipping and import problems, 26	
3. HOME FOOD PRODUCTION POLICY, 1939–41	31
The plowing-up campaign, 31—Producers' prices, 35—"Slaughter policy," 41	
4. CRISIS AND EXPERIMENT IN CONTROL	49
The winter of 1940/41, 49—Carrot and onion marketing, 52—Eggs, 58—Fish, 64	
5. THE PEAK EFFORT IN HOME PRODUCTION, 1942–45	70
Tillage increases, 70—Fertilizers and farm machinery, 72—Farm labor, 77—Potatoes, 79—Livestock, 86	
6. THE CONTROL OF MILK	91
Between the wars, 91—The "Perry" inquiry into distribution costs, 95—Quasi rationing, 99—A new price structure; rationalization of distribution, 103—Safer milk, 108	
7. TOWARD COMPLETE CONTROL, 1942/43	111
Reluctance to extend rationing, 111—Expenditure rationing advocated, 116—Points rationing introduced, 117—The points-coupon banking scheme, 121—Problems of points rationing, 125—"Manufactured foods," "concentration," and transport economy, 128	
8. THE WELFARE ELEMENT IN FOOD POLICY	140
Nutrition and food policy, 140—The national milk scheme, 145—Vitamin supplements, 147—Food subsidies, 150—Watching consumption trends, 155	
9. FOOD AND AIR RAIDS: COMMUNAL FEEDING	160
Preparations against air attack, 160—Air raids on London, 163—Attacks on provincial cities, 168—"British restaurants," 172	

CHAPTER	PAGE
10. OVERSEAS SUPPLIES AND STOCKS, 1942-45	177
Import stringencies and the flour extraction rate, 177—Bread “dilution” and the “austerity” policy, 180—Controversy over stock levels, 183	
11. CONTROL AT ITS ZENITH	190
The trader as civil servant, 190—The Ministry as legislator, 194—Commodity control and allocation, 198—Rationing and retailers’ supplies, 203—Meat and the control of caterers, 208—Self-suppliers, 212	
12. THE TWILIGHT OF CONTROL	216
The prolongation of control, 216—Continued austerity: bread rationing, 219—Character of food administration, 224—The achievement assessed, 229	
CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE	239
INDEX	243

FOOD AND AGRICULTURE IN BRITAIN 1939-45

Aspects of Wartime Control

“We have only got to send across and say we want to give in, and all these difficulties can be avoided.”

Mr. Winston Churchill in the Commons, on the occasion of the announcement that a Food Controller would be appointed (November 1916).

CHAPTER 1

THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

THE FIRST WORLD WAR AND THE REACTION FROM CONTROL

The United Kingdom is utterly dependent on imported food supplies; no increase, however strenuous and costly, in her home food production can do more than mitigate that dependence. Any threat to imports through wartime blockade must be met by rigorous and comprehensive Government control, both of food and of shipping. These were the lessons rubbed home by World War I, when the unrestricted submarine warfare practiced by the Germans from 1916 onward threatened mortally the precarious British food position. So well were they learned, and so quickly, that in the end it was the German, and not the British, food front that collapsed. The introduction of the convoy system, the programming of imports on a national, and indeed an international, scale, the control of food consumption and utilization, and the increase of home production by one-quarter—i.e., to supply 42 percent instead of 34 percent of total requirements—enabled the British to outlast their opponents. The seeming advantage of self-sufficiency in food proved illusory for the Central Powers, since for that very reason their Governments lacked control over their own resources. By contrast, the food-importing British Ministry of Food became the greatest and most successful government economic enterprise, perhaps, that the world had yet seen. Thanks to the Ministry's ability to harness the food trades to serve wartime needs—and to the British navy and mercantile marine—the theoretical advantage of an international division of labor was triumphantly vindicated in practice.

The Ministry of Food of World War I was a new creation. The tail would indeed have been wagging the dog if the task of food control had been entrusted to the existing Board of Agriculture, even had that Department not been but one of three, covering respectively England and Wales, Scotland, and Ireland, then still wholly within the United Kingdom. The decision to appoint a Food Controller appears to have been taken in haste, in the face of mounting industrial unrest about high food prices, to show that the Government meant business. This political move was in line with the evident

need, on administrative grounds, to have a single control for the United Kingdom. Yet, equally, it was politically impossible to brush aside the established Agricultural Departments. The Ministry of Food, according to Beveridge (1, p. 303) had "powers making it in theory at least dominant over production at home as well as over importation, distribution, and prices of food"; in practice, it had to proceed with their consent, if only reluctantly yielded at Cabinet level: "On more than one stricken field of administration it had held its own against the joined forces of the three agricultural departments . . . more often it had been able to divide them."

The political influence of the farming interest had, of course, been increased by the war and the food production campaign. It reached its height in 1919/20 with the appointment of Lord Lee of Fareham, head of the wartime Food Production Department, to be first Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries for England and Wales, and the embodiment in an Act of Parliament (the Agriculture Act, 1920) of the wartime principle of guaranteed prices. But the reaction from this and other forms of economic control was swift and, in a country still wedded to international free trade, disastrous from the farmer's point of view. The year 1921, that saw the demise of the first Ministry of Food, also saw the repeal of the Agriculture Act. Almost before British agriculture could adjust itself to this "betrayal," and to the postwar deflationary policy of the Government, it found itself face to face with a second deflation, resulting from the world slump of 1929. The area returned as "under cultivation" shrank year by year; 12 million acres in 1918, it was below 10 million in 1923, and below 9 million in 1926. Moreover, the decline in tillage was not matched, as it had been in the years before 1913, by increases in the numbers of livestock. Then, it would have been possible to argue, in the face of lamentation, that what was taking place in British farming was a proper adaptation to the growth of population on the one hand, and the opening up of new grain-growing areas overseas on the other; that protective foods such as milk and vegetables must and ought to replace the beef and grain of an earlier age. Around 1930, however, the evidence of agricultural decline was too strong to warrant complacency; there were "depressed areas" in British agriculture, just as there were in British industry, consisting of impoverished farms with derelict fields (2). The capital equipment of farming—buildings, hedges, and ditches—was running down; the system of land tenure and the layout of farms were ill-adapted to the kinds of change that reforming experts like

C. S. Orwin claimed to be necessary, if British farmers were ever again to pay their way in the world market. Orwin even came to advocate the nationalization of land as the necessary precedent to radical agricultural change.

For radical change of any sort the British Governments of the interwar period were not prepared, being predominantly Conservative in complexion. One breach with tradition they were willing to make, either from conviction or under the pressure of events—to abandon free trade. In the financial crisis of 1931 the "National" Government of Ramsay MacDonald sought, and obtained, a mandate from the electors to introduce protection, whether by way of import duties or quantitative regulation of imports. But drastic protectionist measures were even so ruled out, not only by consideration of the reactions of a largely urban electorate, but also because the very imports it was desired to penalize, in the interests of the farmer at home, came very largely from countries within the British Empire. Indeed, the desire to grant Empire preference, as in the Ottawa agreements of 1932, was one of the motives for abandoning free trade.

In these circumstances it was natural that the remedy for agricultural ills should be sought in the reform of marketing. Unorganized farmers, the argument ran, were weak in bargaining power compared with the middlemen; the spread between the price the grower received and the price the housewife paid was too high, and ought to be reduced in the interests of both. This notion was naturally attractive to Socialists, and it was the minority Labour Government of 1929–31 that introduced the first Agricultural Marketing Act. This empowered producers of a wide range of home-grown foodstuffs to prepare schemes, with the approval of the Ministers responsible for agriculture, for the compulsory regulation of the marketing of their products. It was not, however, until the "National" Government passed a supplementary Act, taking power to regulate the import of any product the subject of a marketing scheme, that this new policy really got under way. Between 1933 and the outbreak of war, statutory marketing boards were established for potatoes, milk, bacon, and bacon pigs. (There was also one for hops, but this crop is largely local in interest.) Only the first achieved fair and immediate success; the others encountered various difficulties and none could be said to have attained settled form at the outbreak of war.

The creation of a producers' marketing monopoly, even when reinforced, as in the case of bacon, by a quota limitation on imports,

was not, in the event, found to be a way swiftly to reconcile the farmer's call for higher prices with the consumer's preference for low ones. By 1939 there were many who doubted whether it was even a first step in that direction. The Pigs Marketing Board and the Bacon Marketing Board had found no way of dealing with the farmer's alternative outlet for his pigs—the fresh pork market—and the “pig-cycle” remained unamenable to control; the consumer, thanks to the quota, found himself paying the same amount of money to the Danes for less bacon, but his loss was not the English industry's gain. The Milk Marketing Boards had secured slightly higher prices in the liquid market, but foreign competition in the market for milk products—butter, cheese, and “processed” milk—had forced the manufacturing price down so low that the Government had come to the rescue with a subsidy. A cynic might say, indeed, that the English Board's chief accomplishment before the war was the defeat, by political agitation, of the Milk Industry Bill by which the Government sought to deprive it of its monopoly (see pp. 92–93).

There were, anyway, other farm products for whose troubles marketing reform could not even plausibly be put forward as a panacea; for these, various sorts of subsidy were devised. The Wheat Act of 1932 provided for a “deficiency payment,” financed out of a levy on every sack of flour, to be made to growers of millable wheat sold to “approved buyers”; this payment was equal to the difference between a “standard price,” set from time to time by the Ministry of Agriculture, and the average market price, and was administered by a Wheat Commission, representing all branches of the trade. This subsidy, although the amount of wheat that would rank for it in any given year was limited, had the effect, not of increasing the total cereal acreage, as had been intended, but of encouraging farmers to sow wheat rather than barley or oats; inevitably, therefore, it was followed by a similar price-insurance scheme for the two latter, in 1937. So, too, a subsidy for home-bred fat cattle (accompanied by various quota restrictions on meat imports), introduced in 1934, was extended to fat sheep and lambs in 1939. (A Livestock Commission, charged not only with administering this subsidy but with undertaking experiments in marketing, had been established in 1937.)

Finally, there was a subsidy that stands by itself—that on sugar beet. It had originally been introduced, in the covert form of a remission of excise duty, in 1922, on the grounds that military security, as well as the prosperity of agriculture, demanded the establishment

of a native source of sugar, the normal supplies of which had been cut off overnight when the United Kingdom declared war on Germany. An Act of 1925 had provided a subsidy, on a diminishing scale, for ten years to the “infant industry”; but when that time was up the industry was found as far from being self-supporting as ever. A majority, two members to one, of a Government Committee of Inquiry recommended in 1936 that the subsidy be ended—a logical conclusion in face of a world glut of sugar. But the agricultural interest, and perhaps the fear of war, were too strong. The Government accepted the minority view, set up a Sugar Commission to supervise the industry, and amalgamated the eighteen beet factories into a single British Sugar Corporation, having Government nominees among its directors and financed to some extent by the Treasury.

These measures of assistance, though each and all can be defended on grounds of expediency, did not add up to anything that could be called a *policy* for British agriculture. They rested on no coherent appraisal of the role that its various branches ought to play in the national economy, whether in peace or war. They reflected no discernible scale of priorities that should encourage this product rather than that, whether on grounds of nutrition or defense. At bottom they constituted little more than *pourboires*, given at the instance of a political pressure group—the organized farmers—and hence directed toward maintaining the established pattern of the industry. Even so, their general efficacy is doubtful. The recovery of farm incomes from the low levels of 1932/33 to those, some 15 percent higher, of 1936/37 owed much to the general recovery in world prices, to readjustments in production toward the more profitable livestock, and to some increase in efficiency. Moreover, it remained precarious.

If the Government's measures did comparatively little for agriculture, they much increased the influence of the Agricultural Departments, which were responsible for supervising them. The largest of these, the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries for England and Wales, became a key office, around which political controversy raged—a maker, and more often a marrer, of political reputations in which more than one Prime Minister of the future forfeited his prospects. So, too, the Ministry's Markets Division, and the various Marketing Boards and Commissions, provided a new forcing-ground for economic administrators and experts in regulated marketing, who were to be valuable recruits to the second Ministry of Food. (Many of the writer's contemporaries found in them refuge from

the unemployment that beset economics graduates in those days.) The malaise of the industry might remain unremedied, but the collection of facts about it went on apace. At no time previously can there have been issued such a mass of Blue Books, Orange Books, and White Papers, many of them admirable in lucidity and thoroughness. At no time, for that matter, can there have been so much unofficial writing about what one book took for its title—*The Agricultural Dilemma* (3).

The importance of this book, from the point of view of a study of wartime food policy, was that it denied the validity of the farm bloc's argument that a diminution in food imports and an artificial increase in the tillage area in peacetime would increase the security of the country in time of war. On the contrary, said the authors, it would be a source of weakness, by diminishing foreign trade and hence the merchant navy that trade maintained. Should war come, plowing up could once again be resorted to, which would release the reserves of fertility that remained in the soil from the dung of livestock, fattened on imported feedstuffs. Then, and only then, would be the time to reverse the trend that, apart from the interruption of the first world war, had been going on since the 1870's—a trend entirely consonant with increasing population and improving standards of life. The policy for British agriculture, in this view, and in that of the experts on nutrition whose voices were beginning to make themselves heard, could be summed up in the phrase, "import calories; produce protective foods." If war insurance were wanted, it could be best furnished by acquiring stocks of food, particularly wheat.

This last proposal, coming as it did at the time of the Abyssinian crisis, aroused considerable attention, and during 1936 there developed something of an agitation, in *The Times* newspaper and elsewhere, in favor of a Government stock of wheat. The idea was not new; it had been put forward at least as early as 1903 to a Royal Commission appointed to study the supply of food and raw materials to the United Kingdom in time of war. The Admiralty rejected it, then and later, as an unwarrantable aspersion on the ability of the British Navy to protect merchant shipping. A more important objection, particularly to a large stock, was that its acquisition and turnover would interfere severely with the normal working of the grain trades; if the Government held a year's supply of wheat, it would, in effect, have to become the sole provider of the country's current wheat supplies. (No solution has yet been found to this

problem, bar nationalization of the wheat trade.) Fear of the bombing aircraft, however, was in the Britain of 1936–39 very great; and even the Admiralty would not take the responsibility of opposing the creation of food reserves. The Government, while apprehensive of the economic consequences, was constrained to accept the policy in principle; but not till April 1938 were some reserves actually bought.

FOOD PLANS FOR ANOTHER WAR

The Abyssinian affair brought to the fore not only food storage, but the whole problem of war-food preparations. There had been some desultory activity behind the scenes in Whitehall for some time past on this subject, the main motive force being fear of wartime inflation. As early as 1933 the conclusion had been reached that food control, including rationing, ought to be introduced at the very outset of another major war. So, when the Committee of Imperial Defence, in April 1936, set up a subcommittee on wartime food supplies, almost its first action was to consult Sir William Beveridge, one-time official head of the first Ministry of Food, author of a standard work on *British Food Control*, and at that time Director of the London School of Economics. He was invited to become Chairman of a small group of officials who were to prepare an outline scheme for the introduction of food rationing on the outbreak of war. Beveridge promptly pointed out that this was not enough—that rationing required a whole structure of food control to support it, which needed to be made ready in advance. As a result, the Government decided, in November 1936, to take the unprecedented step of setting up a Food (Defence Plans) Department in time of peace.

The new Department was something less, in status and in scope, than Beveridge appears to have had in mind. He had laid stress, in his report to the Government, on the need to think out wartime feeding-policy, and indeed the whole of the civilian side of the next war, in advance and as a whole—that is, on the need to avoid departmentalism. But the Food (Defence Plans) Department was made subordinate to a full Department of State; its terms of reference emphasized administration rather than policy, and in particular laid down that it was not to be directly concerned with home production. Now the Government had begun by inviting Beveridge to return to the Civil Service as head of the new Department, only to retreat from its negotiations with him within two or three weeks. The ostensible difficulties were financial; but it is difficult not to believe

that the haste of the *volte-face* was due to second thoughts of a rather more fundamental kind. The war-food planners (it seems to have been decided) must be safely circumscribed within an existing departmental ring fence, and not given a roving commission under the Minister for Co-ordination of Defence to make embarrassing forays into other people's territory.¹

It would not be fair to view this episode as if it were merely an instinctive rejection of a foreign body by the civil service organism, though there was something of that about it. There must at all times be a conflict between wartime and peacetime purposes of government, and to begin war-economic planning while still at peace is to bring this conflict into the open; the more so if, as in Britain in 1936, the administration accepted collectivism as a wartime policy while rejecting it in time of peace. Beveridge, ranging wide in speculation over the whole field of civilian war preparations, had forced Whitehall to look at the problem; he could not make Whitehall face it. To make of Food Defence Plans just one more Department was to evade the issue unless (as did not happen) the economic side of the Committee of Imperial Defence were simultaneously strengthened, to take care of the wider aspects of policy. Administrative preparations for food control were but half the job to be done. They were of course a very important half; the best policy in the world must have foundered, at a crisis, without an administrative machine to carry it out. Equally, however, there are difficulties in creating an administrative machine when one is not clear what policies it is to serve.

This did not bother the civil servants concerned so much as an academic observer, used to setting his ideas out in logical order, might have expected. Accustomed in their day-to-day administrative experience to proceed empirically, by trial and error, they had recourse to the formulation of principles—perhaps one should rather call them maxims—only to the extent that was necessary to enable action to proceed; their methods of planning, in fact, were assimilated to those of ordinary departmental administration. Just as, in the process of administration, points arise that must be referred to

¹ Since the account of this episode in my official history (4, pp. 10–11) was published, Lord Beveridge has given the story from his side (5, pp. 240–44). His account shows the financial obstacles, the details of which I had not seen. The underlying reasons remain a matter of surmise; but Lord Beveridge makes it clear that he intended to make himself a one-man Economic General Staff, and if this were evident at the time it would account for the seeming alacrity with which the financial obstacles were seized upon by officials.

Ministers for decision, or discussed with other Departments, so from time to time those planning food control would confer with their colleagues who dealt with agriculture, land transport, or shipping, or request a ruling from the Committee of Imperial Defence. But the mutual exchange of ideas does not necessarily promote their orderly formulation, and in practice there can be no doubt at all that the leaving of initiative in the hands of the individual Departments led to the minimum of thinking being done about general principles. At any rate, much of the actual prewar planning that was done turned out to be based on principles that were insufficiently thought out or even contradictory.

So far as agriculture was concerned, attention was concentrated on preparing for the first year of a "plowing-up" campaign—the physical conversion of pasture to tillage. The decisions in 1937 to increase the wheat subsidy (by raising from 27 million to 36 million cwt. per annum the maximum quantity on which it would be paid) and to grant subsidies on oats and barley (embodied in the Agriculture Act of 1937) may themselves be regarded as measures to prevent the tillage area from decreasing further; the subsidy on lime and basic slag applied to grassland, likewise embodied in the Act, also had its possible conversion to tillage in view. In the spring of 1939, with war obviously likely, the Government offered a "plowing-up" grant of £2 an acre for any grassland plowed in 1939/40 and reseeded or sown to an approved crop; it also promised financial assistance for the draining of waterlogged land. Perhaps most important, it decided to acquire reserves of fertilizers and of tractors, in order that the "grassland" counties might be enabled to make an immediate contribution to the plowing-up campaign. The nuclei of local organizations to conduct this campaign on behalf of the Government were also established, in the form of "shadow" Agricultural Executive Committees, to acquire substance and legal powers immediately a war should break out.

The measures taken by the Food (Defence Plans) Department, though similar in principle, were more complex and in a way more urgent, inasmuch as the war might be won or lost before the plowing-up campaign could have any effect. For the tasks it had to perform, the Department was sadly understaffed until after the Munich crisis; had not its members been able to draw, some on their own experience in the first Ministry of Food and all on the experience of many traders and others who had taken part in the first period of food control, it would have been overwhelmed. As things were,

the Department's attitude to that experience was in some respects insufficiently critical. The establishment of a separate Cereals Control Board (against which Beveridge had given a warning) was one mistake that resulted; and there were others in the field of rationing technique. But on one capital point (among many others) the lessons of the past were thoroughly taken to heart. Control of any food had been—it was held—successful in proportion to its completeness; it followed that in any future war the mature controls of 1918, including rationing, would be wanted from the very start for all the major foods. It was on these, and particularly on those wholly or largely imported, that the Department concentrated its limited resources (6).

What it was seeking to do, that is to say, was to complete in advance, without the stimulus of actual warfare, all the preliminaries that were required before a food was ripe for full control. To lay down the outlines of a control scheme was, in most instances, not difficult; to fill them out with machinery adapted to the idiosyncrasies of each trade meant months of arduous negotiation. The very fact of advance planning before the emergency precluded any attempt to impose ready-made schemes on traders, even had not the Department rightly judged that the smooth coming-into-existence of war-time controls depended on their being acceptable to, and understood by, those who would be subject to them. (The one occasion when it neglected this maxim, for want of time, proved disastrous.) Officials were pleasantly surprised, indeed, by traders' willingness to co-operate and were sometimes embarrassed by the enthusiasm of those dealing in the less important foods to enter into discussions.

The preparations for rationing were equally arduous. Sir William Beveridge had advised, in the light of experience in 1917-18, that provided commodity controls were ready to function at the outbreak of war it would be possible to postpone until then a start on the printing and issue of the ration documents for consumers and traders. An interval of three months between the outbreak of war and the introduction of rationing would, he thought, do no harm. The Department found, however, that he had been too sanguine about the time it would take to print ration books under "outbreak" conditions, when every other Government control would be clamoring for forms. Six months from the outbreak—the minimum in which delivery could be guaranteed—was, it thought, far too long to have to wait for rationing. In July 1937 it was decided to print the ration documents and put them into store in advance of hostilities. Even so, the procurement of special machines for "security" printing took

up much time, and the main ration books were not ready until a few weeks before war broke out. Some ancillary documents were not ready even then.

SECURITY FOOD STOCKS

At the time of the Munich crisis, therefore, the Food (Defence Plans) Department had been at work for twenty-one months; yet not a single commodity control was ready to function, and for some foods, for instance milk and fresh fish, virtually nothing had been done. The lesson the Government drew from these facts, revealed in a secret official inquest into the state of national preparedness in the autumn of 1938, was severely practical. Not only must the Department be enlarged, but the numerous bodies with which, owing to the stringent rules of secrecy hitherto enforced, complete and detailed consultation had hitherto been impossible, must be pressed into service. Co-operation with the numerous statutory Marketing Boards and Commodity Commissions was natural; a more startling departure from precedent, necessary and inevitable though it was, was the acceptance of an offer of help from the great combine, Lever Brothers and Unilever, Ltd., in the working out of the oils and fats control scheme.

The resulting change in the tempo of preparations was dramatic. By August 1, 1939, the deadline set after Munich for their completion, the Department could claim with some justice that the task originally set it in 1936 had been discharged. There were indeed some gaps in the plans; there were (as will be shown later on) some miscalculations. But the control schemes for the major imported foods—wheat, sugar, oils and fats, meat—were ready to function; the individual ration books were in process of being dispersed to stores; the divisional and local offices, without which rationing could not operate, were ready. Directors or advisers, not only for the major but also for some minor foods, had been selected, and an embryo Food Transport Division formed. Measures had been taken to ensure the dispersal of some quantities of tea, butter, and frozen meat from London dockside warehouses in the "precautionary period." The Department had secured emergency reserves of "iron rations" for several millions of people scheduled to leave vulnerable cities under the Government's evacuation scheme.

Moreover, officials had won over a reluctant Cabinet, in the spring of 1938, to a policy of actually buying security stocks of food. The policy had been approved in principle as a result of the

investigation of 1936; but Ministers had been too impressed by the technical difficulties and dangers of a Government entry into the commodity markets, and the financial cost of a storage scheme, to go further. Nor, until the decision to set up the Food (Defence Plans) Department, did there exist a Government agency whose knowledge of, and day-to-day contacts with, the food trades was sufficiently intimate to enable it to undertake such a scheme with confidence.

As eventually carried out, and subsequently legalized by the Essential Commodities (Reserves) Act of 1938, the purchases of sugar, wheat, and whale oil that were undertaken in April of that year were (except for whale oil) more significant as a breach with tradition than as an important contribution to national security. For although, thanks to the co-operation of leading members of the trades, the initial stocks of wheat and sugar were secured without disturbing the market, and satisfactory arrangements made for their storage and turnover, they were so small in total amount as to be readily offset by a fall in trade stocks. For both wheat and sugar this fall seems to have taken place between 1938 and the outbreak of war. The grain trade, already aggrieved because the handling of the security wheat stock had been entrusted solely to the three large milling groups, was still more indignant when, in the autumn of 1938, the Government decided to use the mechanism of the scheme to make a "political" purchase of wheat from Rumania. Grain operators claimed that this sort of unexpected action would make it impossible for the trade to carry on, and demanded a share in the management of the stock. The controversy had not been settled when war broke out; it seems likely that it exacerbated the effect on trade stocks of the fall in markets that followed the record world harvest of 1938. For sugar, the position was complicated by the existence of the international restriction scheme; and it appears that the combined effect of Government purchase of a security stock, a bad home crop in 1938, and the sluggish working of the international machinery for the release of additional export quotas, was to produce a temporary but sharp rise in prices toward the end of the quota year 1938/39. With spot sugar standing at a heavy premium over forward sugar, trade stocks fell sharply during that summer and were only partly restored by extra quota releases before war broke out. The total sugar stock at the outbreak of war was not substantially more than it had been at the end of August 1937, before any security sugar had been bought.

The Department's dealings in whale oil were on a more heroic scale, and (after an initial false start) were made in harmony with the trade. In 1938 it had bought 100,000 tons; in the following year it took advantage of a failure by the Germans to agree with the Norwegian catchers on price, and bought nearly all the available catch of a poor year, some 80,000 tons. (The Germans appear to have supposed that lack of storage tanks would keep the British out of the Norwegian market.) In addition, the trade and the Department between them bought 160,000 tons from other sources. The total stock of oil available to the Oils and Fats Control when it began operations in September 1939 was around 300,000 tons, or a two-years' supply at prewar rates of consumption; this was an invaluable asset in what was, perhaps, the United Kingdom's most vulnerable point on the food front—fats (7).

CREATING A SECOND MINISTRY OF FOOD

The form of the future Ministry of Food that should grow from the nucleus of the small Food (Defence Plans) Department was fixed, in all its essentials, during the last months of peace. It is best understood in terms of two postulates, both of them derived from the experience of 1917-18: the first, that in order to control foodstuffs, the Ministry must itself trade in them, i.e., must become their owner at one or more stages of distribution; the second, that rationing, to be effective, i.e., to guarantee that each citizen got his share and no more, must not only rest on control of supplies but on the tying of each consumer to a single retailer. Ministry trading meant the suspension of organized produce markets or their conversion into instruments of a State purchasing monopoly. Individual businesses would not lose their identity, but would be converted into Government agents, often through the formation of wartime trade associations, sometimes, as with grain, through the employment of existing associations. The appropriate *Commodity Division* of the Ministry of Food's *Supply Department* would become, at any rate for major foods, the sole principal engaged in trade; the less important foodstuffs might be left to private traders operating under license from the Ministry. These commodity divisions were normally staffed largely from the trade, and headed by Directors chosen for their standing in it. (A great deal of pains went toward the choice of these men, and only one or two proved unworthy of selection.) Within each Division would be located professional administrators

who would assist the Directors in their unaccustomed task of operating within the rubrics of the Civil Service; there would also be Finance Directors, professional accountants responsible to a Financial Secretary. Above the Commodity Directors also would be set senior officials charged with a general oversight of policy, and responsible ultimately to the Permanent Secretary, and so to the Minister, the political head of the Ministry. In this way the businessmen imported "for the duration" were integrated, in theory, into the normal chain of responsibility of the British Civil Service. In practice they enjoyed, particularly under the regime of Lord Woolton, himself a businessman, access to the Minister himself.

Over against the Supply Department was set the other main section of the Ministry, which was responsible for running distribution from the consumer end. The actual oversight of physical movement of foodstuffs belonged to the Commodity Divisions, through a network of area offices; the work of the Divisional and Local Services Department—to give it the name it had through most of the war period—was to supervise the determination of the consumer's entitlement, whether he be ration-book holder or catering establishment. The tie to the retailer, with its concomitant need to register locally both consumers and retailers, necessitated the establishment of local food offices, and these were useful on other grounds, e.g., to deal with consumers' complaints, and to look after the enforcement of food regulations. In 1917 a network of local *Food Control Committees* had been set up, in an attempt to avoid sugar rationing by regulating distribution—an attempt in which the consumer-retailer tie had also originated. Many of these Committees had taken an active part in regulating food supplies, and had even pioneered local rationing schemes. They were to be revived this time, but enjoyed virtually no administrative autonomy, serving mainly as a safety valve for public and especially local traders' grievances. The Divisional Food Officers—14 of them for England and Wales, 5 for Scotland—were likewise a revival of previous practice. They were to exercise general supervision over the work of Local Food Offices, and to some, rather ill-defined, extent, over Area Commodity Offices in their areas. But their more important function in fact never came to be exercised; it was to take over responsibility for food supplies if enemy action should cause a breakdown of communications with the central government. As such they formed part of the Government's Regional System for Civil Defence, itself a development of the peacetime emergency organization for dealing

with strikes and civil commotions, under the Emergency Powers Act of 1920.

On the "divisional and local" side, the constitution of the Ministry clearly subordinated the local *execution* of policy to its central *determination*; on the commodity side, this distinction was blurred before the war, partly by a mistaken reverence for history, partly by the expectation that London might be untenable in wartime, partly through a divorce, in the minds of the planners, between machinery and purpose. In 1936 Sir William Beveridge had warned the Government against repeating the last-war mistake of setting up separate control Commissions for cereals and sugar that were never fully integrated into the Ministry of Food; and while recommending the use in wartime of the various bodies set up since 1931 to regulate agricultural marketing, had insisted that they might set up dangerously centrifugal tendencies in a Ministry of Food of the future. The Food Controller (he said, in effect) must be master in his own house. Nevertheless, not only were proposals for sugar and cereals "Control Boards" revived and, in the latter case, actually put into effect for a time, but the Marketing Boards for milk likewise retained their identity. It is true that each was to be nominally subordinate to a high official responsible to the Minister, just as was any individual commodity director. But all these latter were encouraged to expect a great deal of autonomy in, for instance, such matters as price fixing, and were warned that they might be unable to refer to the Ministry because of air attacks. Moreover, the number of supervisory officials was so small that, apart from their initial inexperience in trade matters, they could not be expected to give detailed guidance to each of several commodity directors responsible to them.

For only one aspect, though a very important one, of the future Ministry's task was the need for co-ordination between different commodity divisions realized before the war to the extent of providing special machinery for it. In June 1939 it was decided to set up a standing committee, the Overseas Purchase Board, whose approval would be necessary before any food purchases were made abroad on behalf of the Ministry, and which would, in effect, be empowered to prepare an import program. Moreover, an immediate review of provisional programs for the first year of a war was begun. Unfortunately, the assumptions about shipping on which this review was based were not merely sanguine but fallacious. Nevertheless, the mere existence of the machinery was to prove invaluable to the

Ministry of Food from the very beginning of its career. Had similar thought been given to home-production policy, prices, and distribution generally, the history of these during the first years of war might have presented a more coherent and rational picture.

Even so, it ought to be said that the concepts with which those charged with making the prewar plans for food and agriculture set out were, on the whole, clearer in themselves, and more nearly realized in adequate administrative arrangements, than perhaps any other part of the United Kingdom's war-economic preparations. When one considers the handful of staff devoted to these matters till after Munich, the inadequate provision in Whitehall for the systematic review of the economic problems that war would present, and the discouraging political atmosphere in which the work was undertaken, one can but wonder that so much did emerge successfully when the time came. A critical account of the second Ministry of Food ought to begin and end with a tribute to the tireless and patient ingenuity of those who revived the tradition of the first.

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- 6 For a statement of the Department's own attitude, see Board of Trade, *Report of the Food (Defence Plans) Department for the Year 1937* (H.M.S.O., 1938).
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CHAPTER 2

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF CONTROL, 1939/40

THE BEGINNING OF RATIONING

When war broke out in September 1939, the prearranged plans for commodity control were at once put into effect. Within a few days, Statutory Rules and Orders were issued requisitioning trade stocks of the principal foods, constituting the Government their sole importer, and imposing price control at one or more stages of distribution. For some less important foods, price control orders alone were issued. At the ports, trade committees constituted *ad hoc*, such as the Port Area Grain Committees, took over the handling of cargoes on behalf of the Government. The Divisional and Local Food Offices were established, and the arrangements effected for supplying iron rations to those included in the official evacuation scheme. On September 8, the Ministry of Food was formally constituted under the Crown (Emergency Appointments) Act, and Mr. W. S. Morrison, K.C., M.P., who as Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster had for several months had Ministerial responsibility for food defense plans, became the first Minister of Food. (The title Food Controller was not revived.)

To the general, and remarkable, smoothness of these first stages of food control there had been but one exception of more than transient importance. A scheme for reorganizing the channels of distribution for fresh fish was put into effect without adequate preparation and without the unqualified support of the trade. The resulting chaos in marketing, together with the shortage and high price of fish (that would in any event have resulted from the Admiralty seizure of many fishing vessels for mine-sweeping duties), brought such obloquy on the Ministry that the scheme was abandoned after less than three weeks. The results on the Ministry's fish policy were lasting; they will be discussed in a later chapter. The immediate result for food control generally was to strengthen those who, for one reason or another, were aggrieved by the whole body of wartime restrictions that had been imposed by the Government. This opposition to "controls" gained in strength when the expected air raids did not come, and it was all the more influential because it was largely among those

sections of the public and Press that nominally supported the Chamberlain Administration.

When, therefore, the Ministry of Food sought to proceed to the next stage envisaged in all the prewar plans, namely the issue of ration books and the immediate rationing of sugar, meat, bacon, and fats, it found itself faced with altogether unexpected resistance in the War Cabinet. What had been expected to be a formality became a matter of violent controversy. Rationing of butter and bacon, of which shortages had already become apparent by reason of low shipments from Denmark, was indeed agreed to after a little delay. But it was early December before Ministers would accept the need for rationing meat and sugar also; and so far from rationing margarine, they insisted on freeing its manufacture from control altogether (though the Ministry of Food retained control of the ingredients). The Christmas season was responsible for a slight further postponement; butter, bacon, and sugar were rationed on January 8, 1940. Meat, the whole control scheme for which was revised to meet quasi-political objections, was not rationed till March.

In point of fact, for meat alone were Ministerial hesitations really an effective cause of rationing being postponed; that is to say, the rationing of butter, bacon, and sugar could not have been accomplished noticeably earlier, even had it been decided upon promptly. The reason for this lies in the special feature of the rationing system of the United Kingdom—the administrative guaranty of the individual ration. In the last war, as in the war of 1914–18, the British nation was to be, in Beveridge's words, "fed like an army"; the ration, though (and this is where the military analogy breaks down) it still had to be bought with money, was in effect a Government issue, to which the citizen was entitled. The Ministry of Food would, in its own eyes, have stood convicted of failure if a ration coupon were not honored, and honored from the start. This freely accepted obligation had far-reaching consequences for food control, the most paradoxical of which was that it caused the economic function of the coupon, as an additional form of currency, to be obscured. To British administrators, rationing of an individual food was not to be undertaken unless its supply could be guaranteed. When, later on, they were to restrict the supply to the individual consumer of things like milk and eggs they spoke not of rations, but "allowances," and were even driven to making statements—"Milk is not rationed" is an example—that to the Press and to the man-in-the-street seemed perverse and unintelligible.

This perfectionism had its disadvantages when quick action was required; it was apt to make the best the enemy of the good, and to admit of no halfway house between complete rationing and none at all. Under the pressure of events it was to be modified in later years. But in the early months of war it delayed the rationing timetable by several weeks, because officials would not hear of rationing being introduced at the "consumer end" until the "supply end" was completely organized. They did not even consider, much less accept, the argument that to make replacement of supplies to a retailer contingent upon surrender of coupons would of itself tend to check hoarding and favoritism, and help to hold the position until the complete machine of guaranteed supply could be brought into operation.

The kingpin of that machine was the consumer-retailer tie, or, as British officials generally called it, "registration." Each consumer, with certain exceptions,¹ was obliged to obtain his supplies of a rationed food from a single retailer. Supplies to that retailer, who in his turn was restricted to a number of suppliers nominated by himself, were based on the number of registered customers he had, and regulated by a series of permits going right up to the appropriate commodity division of the Ministry. At each stage of distribution suitable allowances were made, over and above the mathematically correct quantity, to deal with casual customers (e.g., travelers and servicemen on leave or not fed in mess), weighing out, cutting, and breaking bulk. Traders were obliged to make a return of purchases, sales, and stock to the Ministry at short intervals; if these returns disclosed surplus stocks, future permits might be cut down; conversely the trader himself might apply for supplementary supplies for good reason given. Similar arrangements applied to catering establishments and institutions, buying either by retail or by wholesale.

This elaborate organization was bound to take a number of weeks to put into effect. Before the war all the separate operations in the process—issue of ration books to the public, registration, application by the retailer for a permit to obtain rationed food, and so on—had been carefully worked out for each of the foods expected to be

¹ At first there was a special ration book for "travelers," but this was thought to lead to abuses, and in July 1941 it was abolished and its holders given the ordinary ration book. They had to register with a retailer for supplies, but could exchange their "tied" coupons for "untied" ones at the Food Office. The decision not to ration restaurant meals eased the administrative problem of dealing with travelers.

rationed from the start. The public was to get its ration books by mail, addressed to each individual separately by the local food offices. Once this had been decided, the question arose: how were these 45 million names and addresses to be obtained by the offices? One plan, that most favored by the Food (Defence Plans) Department, was to have a ration book application form delivered to each household by the postman, which would be filled in by the householder and returned to the food office. An alternative was to use the returns that would be collected at the nation-wide enumeration of the so-called *National Register*, a kind of census that it was proposed should take place when war broke out, and that would give every resident a distinguishing code number and identity card. The *National Register* was sponsored by another Government Department, and the Food (Defence Plans) Department would have preferred to have nothing to do with it, designed as it was to assist what might be a politically unpopular measure—military conscription. But the Department had been prevailed upon to agree that preparations for national registration and rationing should be concerted so that the one could be used as a basis for the other, should Ministers so decide.

The food planners' objection to the *National Register* had been not on administrative grounds but mainly on the ground that successful opposition to it would involve them in its fall. But when they agreed to use it at the outbreak of war—conscription having been accepted as inevitable by then—they were under a misapprehension about its effect on the rationing timetable. At first they had wanted, and secured Cabinet sanction, to go ahead on the basis of their own household application forms. At their own instance, however, the Cabinet decision was reversed, because they had discovered that even if the ration books were to be issued before the *National Register* was due to be completed, the commodity controls would not be ready for the job of allocating supplies and therefore rationing could not begin. So as to save the public the annoyance of two separate returns, therefore, it was decided to fix "National Registration Day" one week earlier—September 29 instead of October 5—and send out the ration books as soon as possible thereafter.

This decision overlooked one important point of administration: the commodity divisions' preparations for allocating food were not independent of the time when the public received its ration books. The final part of them could not begin until people had chosen their retailers. Unwittingly, therefore, the Department had postponed the earliest possible date for rationing by several weeks. It was only

gradually, during September and October, that the full implications of their timetable dawned on officials. There was indeed some delay in—and some interdepartmental recrimination about—the handing over of names and addresses from National Registration Offices to Food Offices. But in the main, the system that had been devised before the war worked well. What it did not do, and could never have done, was to ensure the introduction of rationing within the three or four weeks, from the word "go," that the Department had postulated was necessary. No system based on registration and allocation could do that unless it were introduced by stages, beginning at the retail end and accepting the inevitable dislocations that must take place in the first few weeks.

As it happened, the delay in introducing rationing did not have the grave consequences the prewar planners had believed it would. The only serious embarrassments were over sugar, of which some 100,000 tons seem to have been "overconsumed" between September and January. Replacement of this had to be made from dollar sources, at a time when the country's reserves of foreign exchange were supposedly being husbanded for a three-year war, and in obvious contradiction of the policy, pursued in the last months of peace, of acquiring stocks of essential supplies for exchange reasons. Nor can criticism be altogether stilled by the fact that rationing worked without serious hitch from the moment it began. Would it have so worked, would it have been possible to introduce so elaborate a system at all, if the outbreak of war had been followed by the intense and sustained air attack almost everyone expected? The answer, to say the least, is not beyond doubt. Even under the actual conditions of civilian life in wartime Great Britain, when air raids on any large scale affected only part of the country for a single autumn and winter, the scheme proved too lavish of paper, time, and manpower. Its principles stood the test of time; its practice had to be simplified and loosened.

The Ministry of Food could count itself fortunate in that during the first winter of war the machine was able to "run itself in." For a time early in 1940 even the rationing of butter and bacon appeared unnecessary, for Danish supplies continued to arrive after the Divisions concerned had insured themselves by buying elsewhere; and the nominal ration had to be raised far above normal average consumption. Meat rationing, too, proved to be less restrictive than had been expected, for peacetime consumption had been overrated. Only sugar, of which the domestic ration, initially 12 ounces per head per week,

was cut to 8 ounces in May when nondollar supplies fell short, was seriously restricted until after the fall of France. Getting used to being rationed was for the public an all but painless process; when the screw did have to be tightened, it was in external circumstances so dramatic and seemingly desperate that food restrictions appeared relatively unimportant.

Even so, the next extensions of rationing were not without their teething troubles. On July 15, 1940, control of margarine and shortening was reimposed, and they were rationed a week later. Butter, which was already rationed, was now included with them as an alternative to margarine, but not to shortening. The total fats ration of 8 ounces per head per week might be taken all in margarine; up to 2 ounces might be taken as shortening; up to 6 ounces as butter. The Ministry could not foresee, and did not care to guess, how much of each type of fat would be taken by consumers under this system of options. In order that no customer should be dissatisfied, it acquiesced temporarily in an overissue of both margarine and butter to retailers, and there was an alarming run on commodity divisions' stocks. Moreover, butter imports so fell off as to make it impossible to allow an option as high as 6 ounces; the amount of butter that might be taken was reduced first to 4 and then to 2 ounces a week. It was not until October that the resulting confusion in permits was sorted out.

Tea, which was rationed at the same time, was the first food for which a surprise was achieved, or, indeed, even attempted. It lends itself so obviously to hoarding that the ordinary procedure was rejected from the start; even a requirement to register would have led to a run on stocks. Fortunately the decision to ration was taken when stocks at all stages of distribution were ample. Moreover, the new Minister of Food, Lord Woolton, insisted that, contrary to the practice in 1918, there should be neither a pooled National Control Tea or a consumer-retailer tie. People, he felt, set great store by a choice of blends; and throughout his period of office, covering the worst trials of the war, he resisted the recurrent pleas of his officials that National Tea and registration would secure economies in transport and a more effective price control. Their initial objections to rationing without registration had been largely overcome because tea rationing was originally hoped to be only a temporary measure. The allocation of tea was to remain, as it had been before rationing, based on a prewar datum of traders' turnover, adjusted where necessary for population movements. There was thus no problem of dis-

tribution to be settled in advance before rationing should begin, and no need to give any warning even to the trade of what was impending. Nevertheless, the purists of rationing regarded tea rationing as "loose and anomalous." Whether it was in fact so much worse than the "tighter" registration system will be discussed later.

Rationing of the domestic consumer was only part of the whole picture. Institutions—such as hospitals, schools, and prisons—obtained permits to acquire rationed food in accordance with the number of their inhabitants, whose ration coupons had to be surrendered. Hotels, restaurants, and cafés, licensed by the Ministry as *catering establishments*, also worked on a permit basis, but their supplies were calculated in terms of meals served, of which they were obliged to furnish records. (For a time their meat supplies were calculated as a proportion of past supplies.) Originally it had been intended to exact the surrender of half a meat coupon (i.e., one quarter of a week's meat ration) for every meat meal served in a restaurant. But this had been put aside "for the present" when meat rationing was actually introduced, and in fact was never to come into operation. On the other hand, hotel residents for five nights or more were obliged to hand in their coupons for cancellation.

It may be well at this point to say something about the ration book itself. Based originally very closely on that used in 1918, it was to undergo a series of additions, modifications, and simplifications as time went on. Generally, since it had to go to press very many months before coming into use, events rendered some part of each issue out of date or inconvenient from the very beginning. But in principle it remained the same, consisting, for each straight-rationed food, of weekly *coupons* to be surrendered or canceled by the retailer;² of *counterfoils* to be lodged with him and subsequently transferred to the local food office as evidence of *registration*; and of a detachable *reference leaf* which served as an application form for

² Until the end of 1940 the coupons had to be cut out by the retailer. Perforated coupon pages had been considered, but added too much to the already lengthy process of printing and binding. Protests by the trade led to the substitution of cancellation for cutting out; the latter was subsequently reinstated for tea (April 1942) and very much later for soap (May 1945). It should be noted that except for these later occasions (and for points goods; see p. 118) the cut coupon never served as a basis for replacement. Lack of manpower in food offices prevented more than a sample check of coupons surrendered by retailers.

The abandonment of coupon cutting made it possible to reduce the coupons to very small proportions—spaces for cancellation—and then to rearrange them in date order so that the retailer could cancel a whole week's rations by a stroke of the pen, instead of having to turn over numerous pages.

a further book when the current one should expire. Besides named coupons, there were provided, particularly in the earlier issues, a number of "spare" coupon pages and counterfoils in case some food had to be rationed unexpectedly. These naturally were reduced as more and more foods were brought into the scheme. Apart from the general civilian ration book there were special books for children under six (later, under five) and merchant seamen whose rations were laid down by law. Besides the ration book for travelers, later discarded, there were printed beforehand two others, for heavy workers and adolescent boys, that were never brought into use.

Most, if not all of the foods rationed in the first year of war, as well as certain others, were consumed not only in their simple form, but as ingredients of "manufactured foods": sugar and fats in cake, biscuits and crackers, candy, and ice cream; some kinds of meat in sausages, for instance. Supplies of rationed food to manufacturers were covered by the rationing Order; in general, permits were issued for quantities determined by reference to prewar performance. The cuts, if any were imposed, took into account the importance of the final product in the diet. At this stage of the war, however, they were determined by more or less rule-of-thumb methods applied by individual commodity directors; no general policy for manufactured foods had yet been laid down or even considered, nor did means exist for controlling their output. In many cases stocks in the hands of manufacturers, often hastily acquired during the precontrol period, served to cushion the effect of reduced allocations; it was not until toward the end of 1940 that serious shortages of manufactured foods were felt in retail stores, and it began to be realized that commodity directors, in solving their own problems of making scarce supplies go round, had created a whole set of new ones.

SHIPPING AND IMPORT PROBLEMS

In the summer of 1940, even after the military disasters on the Continent, the Ministry of Food, and indeed the whole British Government, was still regarding the stage of food control and restriction it had then reached as an end rather than a beginning. The Prime Minister himself gave instructions, in August, that food consumption was to be restricted no more than was compatible with adequate stockbuilding. Hopes ran high of increasing the sugar and fats rations, and of derationing tea altogether—hopes that rested on a misconception of the future shipping position that, leaving aside

the benefits of hindsight, is extremely difficult to explain. One can, indeed, scarcely say more than that established errors die hard.

The belief that war would not bring with it an immediate shortage of merchant shipping can be traced back to some errors of calculation in the early rearmament period that the writer has discussed more fully elsewhere (1, pp. 62-67). Broadly speaking, these errors can be described as follows. In the first place, the requirements of a wartime import program for the United Kingdom were put too low, and in particular it was assumed by those responsible for shipping plans that a 25 percent cut, or 5 million tons, could at once be made in imports of food and feedstuffs. Second, no adequate analysis was made of the extent to which the efficiency of the merchant fleet would be reduced by wartime restrictions and delays, apart from enemy action; or, more particularly, of the initial disorganization of imports that would occur. Third, it was assumed that there would be no difficulty or delay in securing neutral tonnage in any quantities desired. The conclusion was therefore drawn that there would be no need for complete shipping control at the outset of war, and that the tonnage available would be sufficient to enable a considerable switch from nearer to farther sources of supply, in order to save hard currency. Moreover, the original basis of this reasoning, namely the 25 percent cut in food imports, had by 1939 been transmuted by the food planners into a reason for *increasing* hypothetical loading programs in that very proportion. The country therefore entered the war unprepared for import cuts, and with inadequate stocks of raw materials and foodstuffs (other than whale oil).

The difficulties that must in any case have attended so great an expansion of administrative effort as took place in the autumn of 1939 were thus exacerbated by an unexpected and sharp drop in the arrivals of bulk foodstuffs from overseas. There were no air raids to give Ministers and the public a sense of crisis; there were relatively few sinkings; but there were delays innumerable that had a double result—a fall in stocks and a shortage of outgoing vessels to bring back further cargoes, especially cereals. Stocks of wheat and flour fell alarmingly, and every available ship had to be sent to the St. Lawrence to load wheat before the close of navigation. This measure in its turn threatened to perpetuate through the winter the already serious shortage of coarse grains—particularly maize—for animal feeding. Of these there were no stocks at all; a plan to acquire Government reserves of feedstuffs had not got beyond approval in

principle when war broke out. There was widespread—though as it turned out, groundless—apprehension of a wholesale slaughter of animals, particularly pigs and poultry. Moreover, though control of prices and marketing had been promptly applied to home-grown as well as imported wheat—of all foods the least likely to become scarce—the necessary Statutory Orders were not ready for barley and oats, and the various interests concerned were unable to reach agreement for several months even on the principle. Meantime prices soared; oats, which had been six shillings a hundredweight at the outbreak of war, rose by January to fifteen shillings amid vigorous complaints from the Scottish oatmeal millers that they could not obtain supplies for human consumption at a reasonable price. When control was finally imposed on oats, the price had to be fixed at eleven shillings for feeding and twelve shillings for milling; and since it was impossible to distinguish between the imported and the home-grown grain, the controlled price of the former had to be raised also. The shortage and high price of feedstuffs in its turn reacted on the prices to be paid for meat under control, and so threatened to set off an inflationary spiral. The effect on general price policy—both for producers and consumers—will be discussed later.

The wheat position continued to be difficult for some months. Stocks were never really dangerously low, although they were maldistributed between east and west coast ports. The Government security stock had been held on the west, as less vulnerable to air attack; for the same reason, ships that normally would have come to London and the east coast had been diverted to the west as a precautionary measure. No special arrangements had been made to feed the east coast mills overland; as a result they ran very short of grist, and one or two were actually stopped for a short time. Meantime the Government security stock was virtually untouched, and for all the practical use it was at this time, might just as well have not existed. The position was remedied mainly by lifting the east coast ban on grain ships, but it was to have a permanent effect on the Ministry's wheat-stocks policy. For the influence of maldistribution of stocks on this first autumn crisis does not seem to have been fully understood, and in consequence the required minimum working stock of wheat and flour was believed to be far greater than was really the case. In December 1939 the Cabinet reaffirmed the principle of maintaining thirteen weeks' stock of wheat and flour at all times; during the course of the war, largely because of the memory of this first crisis, that principle became transmuted into the postulate that,

unless thirteen weeks' stock existed, there was a danger of distribution breaking down.

While stocks of essential foods were falling, and great difficulty was being encountered in chartering sufficient tramp tonnage for them, the Ministry of Food was embarrassed by a flood of minor foodstuffs. Things like coffee, canned fruit, sago and tapioca, imported on private account in liner space, arrived in far greater quantities than normal. The means to stop them was for some months absent; the prohibition and licensing of non-Governmental imports was vested in another Department, the Board of Trade, which had insufficient staff and information to act quickly and without risk of error. (This, of course, was another result of the miscalculation of shipping prospects.) The out-and-out luxuries, such as caviar and candied fruits, were easy to deal with; but other things, like agar-agar and isinglass, which are used as raw material for numerous manufactured foods, were less easy to deal with. Nor could these problems be settled on their technical merits alone. Political questions—the need to appease friends or embarrass the enemy—made themselves felt. There was some reluctance to admit, publicly as well as privately, that the shipping shortage would be there for the duration; and some difficulty in convincing, for instance, the United States and Canadian governments that British imports of such things as apples and canned peaches must cease, in order to reserve dollars for munitions and essential food and raw materials. The issue of Statutory Rules and Orders prohibiting the import, except under Government license, of a wide range of semiessential and luxury foodstuffs aroused considerable protest from exporting countries, which might have continued longer but for the beginning of active enemy operations on the Continent.

After the Germans had overrun the Low Countries there was for a time serious talk of cutting the food import program for the second year of war by 25 percent compared with the first year, i.e., from roughly 20 to 15 million tons. This was expected by some to be necessary not on account of a shortage of ships, but because the ports on the east coast of Britain might be closed wholly or partly to shipping. The remaining ports would, it was thought, be incapable of handling imports on the scale hitherto envisaged, and a deliberate cut might be wiser policy than leaving port congestion to perform the work of import reduction. The analysis was almost certainly correct, but its opponents argued strongly that the consequences of accepting it were too unpleasant to be incurred of set purpose. For

the moment there was plenty of shipping; if the besiegers were to close in, Great Britain would need all the stock of food she could lay hands on. So far from being cut, therefore, the Ministry of Food program for September 1940–August 1941, which in the spring had been worked out at rather less than 18 million tons, was now raised to 19 million.

The implications of this were most important in the realm of livestock policy. The difference between a 15-million- and an 19-million-ton program was partly one of canned and fresh fruit, but mainly one of animal feedstuffs. The fears of a widespread slaughter of stock during the winter of 1939/40 had not so far materialized. Even the numbers of pigs and poultry, which were last in the Government's order of priorities, had not so far fallen to any great extent—a comforting fact if supplies of feedstuffs could be maintained, an alarming one if they could not. The Ministry of Food, aware of German experience in the last war, was haunted by the possibility of farmers attempting to maintain too many animals on too little feed and was particularly apprehensive of a catastrophic fall in milk production. It was backed up by the scientists whom the War Cabinet had called in to advise on food policy. The Ministry of Agriculture, though it accepted this view in principle, was clearly less excited about it, and very unwilling to take any measures that savored of coercing farmers. Even so, it too agreed that a scheme for rationing animal feedstuffs would be necessary. Discussions on such a scheme had been going on for several months, but it was not to be ready to operate till early 1941. It was this administrative hiatus in control, which itself was partly due, perhaps, to a hope that animal-feed rationing might somehow be avoided, that made the sudden fall in food imports that did come from September 1940 onward so embarrassing.

CITATION

¹ R. J. Hammond, *Food: The Growth of Policy* (History of the Second World War, U.K. Civil Series, H.M.S.O., 1951).

CHAPTER 3

HOME FOOD PRODUCTION POLICY, 1939–41

THE PLOWING-UP CAMPAIGN

On September 1, 1939, the Government's wartime organization for agriculture was formally brought into existence. In each administrative county in England and Wales were set up War Agricultural Executive Committees (C.W.A.E.C.'s), 61 in all, composed of a small number (originally seven) of local residents of standing, appointed by the Minister of Agriculture. These Committees, whose members were unpaid, were assisted by a network of subcommittees, both local and functional, and each had a full-time Executive Officer, chosen as a rule from among the agricultural staffs of the County Councils. In Scotland, where the County Councils had before the war less to do with agricultural organization, and where, moreover, the counties were often either too small, or too large and scattered, to make suitable units of administration, District A.E.C.'s, eventually 42 in number, were set up. In Scotland also the Department of Agriculture appointed standing liaison officers between itself and the district committees, and in general exercised closer central control over them.

The powers delegated to the Executive Committees, under certain safeguards, were extensive. They included general powers of requisition, inspection, and direction, such as were enjoyed by any "competent authority" under the Defence Act of 1939, and also specific powers conferred by the Act on the Ministers responsible for agriculture. They might determine the use to which any agricultural land should be put, and enforce their orders by eviction; they might dispossess any farmer whose land was not cultivated "in accordance with the rules of good husbandry"; they might direct that vermin, rabbits, and deer must be destroyed within a specific period (*1*). As time went on these powers were to be increased and tightened up; moreover, the Committees came to exercise a detailed administrative control over farming through the rationing of feedstuffs, fertilizers, and farm machinery, and through their part in the operations of the wartime control of manpower and womanpower under the National Service Acts. They were also to become operators of

farm machinery and employers of agricultural labor on a considerable scale.

Most of this, however, lay in the future. In the autumn of 1939 the Committees had to build up their organization from scratch: to secure office staff, organization, and equipment; to bring their district subcommittees into being, and, almost simultaneously, to set the plowing-up campaign afoot; to certify farmers' claims for the plowing-up grant of £2 an acre that had been introduced in the spring of 1939; and—perhaps above all at this time—to deal with a host of enquiries about military service, farm equipment, shortages of feedstuffs and seeds. Only gradually was it possible for the local organizations to establish personal contact with each of the 300,000 farmers who had to be mobilized in the food production campaign. No two farms were identical in soil, in layout, in buildings, or in climate; no two farmers, in temperament, training, and experience. Only by a laborious survey involving one or more visits to every holding in England and Wales, could complete data be secured on which to plan for increased agricultural output. This survey (2) and a somewhat less exhaustive one for Scotland were begun in June 1940 and completed two years later. They provided the information with which the greatest efforts of wartime production were organized.

Even had this information been available when war broke out, it could not then have been put to significant use. Such an expansion of production as was eventually attained in 1943 and 1944 went far beyond the hopes and plans of 1939. Indeed, resulting as it did in such a distortion of the prewar pattern of British agriculture that return to it would be painful in the extreme, it would have been dismissed by most—like so much else in the food policy of the United Kingdom—as chimerical and dangerous if propounded beforehand. Neither the officials of the Ministry of Agriculture nor the farming community had forgotten the Corn Production Act and its sequel, the “betrayal” of 1921, when the Government had abandoned the system of guaranteed prices and markets for farm produce that it had re-enacted the year before. Discussions of food production policy within Whitehall, in the first winter of war, stressed the need to keep it within bounds so as to avoid postwar difficulties of adjustment. Even as late as August 1940, Mr. Churchill instructed his Minister of Agriculture to aim at a “large but not excessive” increase in production. Such reservations as these could not affect the size of the plowing-up program for the first year of war; that was set by

the resources available. But they help to explain the gradualness with which the full program was set forth.

At the outbreak of war the target set for the first season's plowing was an extra two million acres in the United Kingdom (1½ million in England and Wales), or one-tenth of the area under pasture in June 1939. The first call to farmers was, therefore, that they should plow up about one-tenth of their permanent pasture. It should, they were told, be sown with wheat “where it is likely to yield a satisfactory crop”; alternatively it might be used for potatoes or for oats, barley, beans, peas, rye, or mixed corn (3). This order of priorities had survived from discussions in 1935 and 1936, when a necessarily arbitrary assumption laid down for planning purposes—that food imports would be reduced by 25 percent in wartime—had been interpreted to mean that all imported foods would be scarce to the same extent and that therefore, from the very first, home agriculture ought to aim at producing more wheat and more potatoes for human consumption.

Such a conclusion did not necessarily follow from the hypothesis of a 25-percent cut in food imports. On the contrary, it was to be expected that the Ministry of Food would insist on maintaining imports of human food at the expense of animal feedstuffs, which in time of peace amount to more than one-quarter of the total imports of food and feeds into the United Kingdom. Moreover, between 1936 and 1939 the hypothesis had been transmuted by stages into an argument that there would be no shortage of ships in the first year of war and no need for any drastic cut in food imports. If food were to be available in normal quantities from overseas, millers would not welcome more high-cost, soft English wheat; nor the public, extra potatoes, of which an existing marketing scheme was already restricting the acreage. Certainly—it began to be argued, and the argument was rapidly reinforced by what was actually happening in the autumn of 1939—an initial shipping shortage would fall most heavily on supplies of feedstuffs. Moreover, whereas imported wheat was inexpensive and good stowage, livestock products were expensive and the only likely source of them in quantity was North America; the United Kingdom was husbanding dollar resources for a three-year war.

By the end of 1939, therefore, a more cautious and, as it seemed, more realistic policy was being formulated, that stressed the already sharply felt shortage of imported feedstuffs. Farmers were urged to grow more feedstuffs for themselves; specialist raisers of pigs and

poultry, who depended wholly or mainly on purchased feeds, were warned (4) that they must expect a cut of at least one-third in their supplies, priority in which would go to dairy cows. A rationing scheme for feedstuffs began to be discussed about this time, though it was not until the late summer of 1940 that it began to be regarded as inescapable.

The German victories in the West, however, made it plain that a further extension of tillage would be required for the harvest of 1941. At the end of May 1940, the Cabinet appointed a Scientific Food Committee, on the lines of the Royal Society's Food (War) Committee that had played so important a part in the war of 1914-18, and including such authorities as Sir John Boyd Orr and Professor E. P. Cathcart. This Committee propounded a "basal diet," consisting of wholemeal bread, fats, milk, potatoes, and other vegetables, in defined quantities per head, which they thought should serve as the foundation for import and home production policy if, as seemed to them likely, the United Kingdom was facing years of siege. A diet so constructed, it was claimed, would in fact be an improvement, nutritionally speaking, on the prewar diets of the British poor; but it would mean a great change in eating and farming habits. The British people would be put on a largely vegetarian, "peasant" regimen; the British farmer would have to dispose of much of his livestock. Both changes would be extremely unpopular; the Prime Minister, who disliked all forms of rationing and set meat high in his scale of personal preferences, was a representative Englishman in this.

It may not be fanciful to suggest that the stark austerities of the basal diet, while they may have served to dispel uneasiness about the results of a fall in imports, made Ministers and officials all the more reluctant to take any drastic steps in that direction, once the first shock of the military defeat had worn off. But there were practical reasons to back up this reluctance. Milk production would be difficult to maintain, let alone increase, under wartime conditions; milk distribution was (it was thought) exceptionally liable to be dislocated by air attack, since commodity, containers, and pasteurizing and bottling plants were all vulnerable (its maintenance successfully throughout the London raids was a remarkable achievement by the trade). The consumption of vegetables, other than the storable, and therefore controllable, potato and carrot, was likely to fall under the impulse of rising prices; the trade could not be readily controlled and organized in a way that would permit the injection

of a subsidy in aid of retail prices. Lack of milling capacity would prevent any substantial rise in the consumption of oatmeal (though this was not realized at the time). Moreover, the import reductions expected had not, in August 1940, yet manifested themselves; nor was there any easing of the foreign exchange situation so as to allow of extra imports of livestock products from North America.

Most of the scientists' proposals, therefore, were rejected in favor of what was described as a more "flexible" cropping policy. A further two million acres were scheduled for plowing up in 1940/41. Farmers were to be urged to grow wheat on all suitable land; but they were also to be encouraged to grow more crops for animal feed—oats, beans, kale, and roots. Only for potatoes was an extra acreage, amounting to 190,000, or one-third more than in 1940, to be secured by the issue of compulsory directions by County War Executive Committees. The "flexibility" in this program was, to say the least, theoretical; it consisted in the possibility of diverting oats and barley away from, respectively, animal feed and beer into bread. (Events were to show that unless genuine surpluses occurred this was not feasible on any scale without draconic measures.) In November, under pressure of the imports crisis, the acreage for plowing up was raised to 2¼ million; but by then it was too late in the season to sow more wheat (which in the United Kingdom is almost entirely an autumn-sown crop).

With the solitary exception of potatoes, therefore, the crops to be sown for the 1941 harvest were, as they had been for the 1940 harvest, left largely to the discretion of farmers. The principal influences on this discretion, leaving aside local and personal circumstances and Government exhortation, were two: the feedstuffs situation and the movement of prices for farm produce since the outbreak of war. These affected, of course, the output of livestock products as well as crops.

PRODUCERS' PRICES

During the first two years of war, indeed, Government attention, at any rate at the center of affairs, was more often occupied with livestock policy than with the plowing-up campaign. It is not difficult to see why this should have been so, for once the decisions about the latter had been taken for any given season, they could not substantially be altered. Supplies of milk and meat, on the other hand, both current and prospective, were matters which, given the shortage of imported feedstuffs that set in as soon as war broke out, required

with them perforce the price of those grains when imported by the Ministry of Food.

Meantime farmers had been promised, by way of stimulus to the food production campaign, something more than their prewar profits. "If the desired increase in home production is to be secured," the Minister of Agriculture told the House of Commons on December 14, 1939, "a higher level of prices will be necessary for agricultural products generally which will provide farmers with a reasonable profit and at the same time enable them to pay a fair wage to the workers" (6). The initial prices for livestock under control, and the "pool" prices for milk under the Marketing Schemes, had thus to be increased by substantially more than the increase in farmers' costs. In practice, the latter could not be computed with any accuracy, particularly for the marginal forms of production that it was desired to encourage in wartime; estimates by the agricultural economists could do no more than provide the Government with some sort of ground on which to strike a bargain with farmers' representatives. Moreover, prices for livestock were settled before those for milk, with the result that the latter were to some extent enhanced lest the new prices for the former encourage a switchover from milk to beef production.

By the spring of 1940 the combined effect of accident and expedient on farm prices could be summed up roughly as follows: prices of oats and feeding barley had been at length controlled at about double the prewar levels; the price of barley for malting was higher still, and uncontrolled (though it was hoped to keep it in check by restrictions on the output of beer and whisky). The price of fat cattle had gone up, compared with that of a year earlier, by about 20 percent; that of fat sheep by rather more. The price of milk and fat pigs had gone up about 25 percent. By contrast, the price of wheat had gone up by only 10 percent, and that of main-crop potatoes not at all (although growers were now guaranteed a market for all they had to sell). These price changes viewed as a whole clearly bore no relation to changes in costs, which must have been negligible for crops already harvested and heaviest for dairy cattle, which are most dependent on purchased feedstuffs. It was computed at the time that the order of profitability of farm products was: oats, eggs, pigs, fat cattle, wheat, sheep, milk, sugar beet, and potatoes. This order, it was pointed out, was almost entirely contrary to the agreed wartime priorities.

Such was the position when, in May 1940, the German attack in

the West caused the Government to decide that a greater effort must be made by home agriculture—an effort that would definitely be beyond the industry's existing resources in labor, fertilizers, and capital. Workers were tending to drift away from the land into better-paid occupations. It was therefore decided: (a) to prohibit employers in other industries from engaging agricultural workers, and to direct former agricultural workers who should become unemployed back to the land;² (b) to instruct the statutory Agricultural Wages Boards to prescribe a national minimum wage of 48/- a week for men, an increase of from 8/- to 13/- according to area.

The new wage rates were to come into force on July 1, 1940; the Government undertook to help farmers recoup their extra labor costs by paying higher prices both for livestock and for the crops to be harvested in 1940. It was reckoned that the increase in labor costs alone would be about £15 million a year; that costs of production had already gone up, since the war began, by some £35 million a year; but that farmers' receipts had already, by reason of the changes that have been described, risen by about £62 million. However, the difference between these figures, officials thought, might reasonably be charged to "incentive"; and it might also be worth while to award rather more than £15 million so as to get elbowroom to make adjustments in the relative scales of prices, and in particular to give more for potatoes, wheat, and milk. When, however, the recommendations reached Cabinet level, all these niceties were swept aside. The Minister of Agriculture and his colleagues responsible for Scotland and Northern Ireland declared themselves in favor of a general all-round increase, calculated to give farmers some £34½ million, and, moreover, perpetuating the haphazard order of priorities that had given such offense to the experts. The Treasury and the Ministry of Food protested, but on the morrow of the Dunkirk evacuation Ministers were in no mood for haggling with farmers, and the new prices went through. It was stipulated, however, that they should only apply to the remainder of 1939/40; after much argument between Departments, some adjustments were made for 1940/41 that redressed, to a slight extent, the balance in favor of the more desirable products.

So great had been the effort and time expended in these price discussions that it was decided to reduce, so far as possible, the occasions for them in future years by subsidizing prices of feedstuffs and fertilizers. This, coupled with the very generosity of the price award

² This was done by the Undertakings (Restriction on Engagements) Order of June 1940 (5, No. 877).

continual watching, evoked continuous comment from the farming community, and, partly for historical reasons, aroused keen controversy. The first year's plowing-up program was not expected to trench severely upon the supplies of grass available to feed the country's sheep and cattle; indeed, it was even supposed in the autumn of 1939 that extra sheep might be raised under war conditions, and a special bonus on fat-sheep prices was offered to encourage breeding. (It was, of course, completely ineffective in face of the widespread reduction in the grazing area, and sheep numbers fell rapidly in 1940, as they had in similar circumstances in World War I.)

The interdepartmental debates on livestock policy that were almost continuously in session until the summer of 1941 were concerned not so much with principles themselves as with the timing and extent of their enforcement. There was no question that the order of priority for livestock should be: dairy cows, beef cattle and sheep, pigs and poultry. Nor was there apparently any serious doubt that a rationing scheme for feedstuffs would be necessary unless, as was hoped for a time, the shortages of the first winter of war were merely transient. But ought the control of prices and marketing to be used as a means of encouraging or discouraging different types of stock, or for that matter different crops? At what stage, if at all, should the Government use requisition, whether of beasts or of the grain they might feed on, as a means of deliberately enforcing livestock reductions?

The separation of responsibility between the Ministry of Food and the Agricultural Departments sharpened the edge of the inevitable conflict between theoretical ideals and political and practical realities. It is perhaps not unfair to say that its officials' very awareness of the opposition to be faced strengthened the Ministry of Food's advocacy of price schedules that should distinguish sharply between those products it held more desirable in wartime—milk, wheat, and potatoes—and those less desirable, like oats, pigs, and eggs; and caused the Ministry's advisers to watch almost avidly for signs of a swingover from milk to beef production, and to place great reliance on calculation as a means of detecting future deficiencies in feed supplies. On the other hand, the Agricultural Departments quite naturally resented attempts from other agencies to teach them their business:¹ they were skeptical about the influence of elaborate price

¹ These antipathies went back to the earlier war. Mr. R. E. Prothero, as President of the Board of Agriculture in 1917/18, had asked that the then Ministry of Food

schedules on farmers' behavior, conscious that discrimination between products might be interpreted as unfairness between producers, and anxious not to sacrifice the imponderable advantages of farmers' goodwill on the altar of scientific priority. Moreover, it was not until the late spring of 1940 that agricultural price policy in general was systematically discussed between the Ministry of Food, the Agricultural Departments, and the Treasury. In the meantime a series of unforeseen developments and piecemeal decisions had both considerably increased the level of farm prices and greatly changed their relation to one another.

In the last months of peace it had been assumed, on the assurances of those responsible for planning shipping control, that no immediate shortage of tonnage or rise of freight rates would occur on the outbreak of war; and that there would, therefore, be no difficulty in holding existing price levels for home-produced as well as imported foods until such time as new price schedules could be drawn up to meet war conditions. It had also been assumed that the Ministry of Food would immediately become the sole purchaser "off farms" of the principal cereal crops and of livestock.

In the autumn of 1939 these expectations were disappointed. The initial shortage of shipping fell most heavily on imported maize and barley; but the control Orders for home-grown oats and barley were not ready. The shortage of wheat itself rapidly became so acute that the Ministry of Food was constrained to make an Order directing that two-thirds of all wheat sold to approved buyers should be sent for flour milling—a step that was bound to enhance the price of other grains. Moreover, Ministers, in face of the attack on "controls" already mentioned, were slow to approve the introduction of the livestock control scheme, with its drastic reorganization of marketing and reduction in the number of slaughterhouses. Originally scheduled for operation, together with meat rationing, within weeks of the outbreak of war, it was postponed until January 1940. The Agricultural Departments, which had urged before the war that feedstuffs prices should be stabilized, could nevertheless not be rapidly persuaded to agree to the corollary of this proposal, namely control of home-grown oats and barley prices. By the time that control could be brought into effect—both of these (5, Nos. 117 and 1398) and of livestock marketing—the price of home-grown oats and of feeding barley had risen to more than double the prewar levels, carrying

should regard the Board "as part of the machinery of government, instead of a rival concern to be run out of business as rapidly as possible."

in 1940, made it possible to avoid during the rest of the war any repetition of the general uplifting process, except at the end of 1941, when a further rise in wages (from 48/- to 60/-) was awarded to farm workers. On that occasion, however, the Government did not give farmers substantially more in the form of prices than the equivalent of the wage rise itself; and when, in 1943, a further 5/- was added to the minimum wage, no compensation was given to farmers, on the ground that their estimated profits had increased since the last price award by £30 million, double the amount that the new wage rise would cost them. At these and various other times certain adjustments were made in favor of particular farm products that it was desired to encourage, or to influence marketing; and in most cases these adjustments added to farmers' profits. On the other side must be set the belated control, in 1942, of the price of malting barley, which had risen to astronomical levels.

Before the war the gross income of United Kingdom farmers was reckoned at about £300 million a year, their net profits (before taxation) at £60 million or less. In the first three years of war their net profits rose to about £200 million, of which not more than one-eighth was reckoned to have gone in increased *direct* taxation; the greater part of this rise is attributable to the price changes that culminated in the awards of the summer of 1940. Would it be right, therefore, to endorse the general feeling, outside the Agricultural Departments, that the awards were too generous?

It seems fair to assert that farm prices might have been kept more within bounds if the initial miscalculation about freights and the confusion of the first months of war had not allowed prices of oats and barley to soar. Had the prewar planners been more clear-sighted, they might have been able to introduce a policy of subsidizing costs to the farmer, instead of prices to the consumer. On the other hand, some means had to be found of enabling an industry that is generally held to have been short of capital before the war, to undertake, in conditions of rising costs, a large increase in output. Generous prices, though they might not be the most refined way of providing the basis of a credit pyramid, were perhaps the quickest and easiest way, and one moreover that for that very reason was the most encouraging the Government could take (7). It ought not to be forgotten, moreover, that a part of these high profits must be credited to the fact that production, partly thanks to good weather, exceeded the expectations on which the price schedules had been drafted, and that on a free market prices would have been higher

still. "All the same," to quote the official historians of U.K. wartime economic policy, "if the policy of financial incentives had been applied with similar generosity to all the other sections of the population who were vital to the war effort, the war economy might well have become unmanageable" (8, p. 161).

"SLAUGHTER POLICY"

The danger that higher prices to farmers would restrict food consumption below what the Ministry of Food thought desirable had been averted by the Government's decision to continue to subsidize prices to the consumer. What provoked the disquiet of many, including the members of the War Cabinet's Scientific Food Committee, during the autumn and winter of 1940/41, was not the general level of farm prices, but the want of any rationally determined relationship between the price of one product and another. Supporters of a price schedule that should encourage wheat and milk and discourage oats and beef were unconvinced by the Agricultural Departments' claim that, given reasonably remunerative prices all round, farmers would not be so influenced by the relative profitability of beef compared with milk or barley compared with oats, as to switch from their habitual practice. Enthusiasts for nutrition as a basis of production policy felt that the Agricultural Departments were regrettably lukewarm about milk and potatoes. The arguments about prices, in fact, reflected a wider divergence about policy in general, and their resolution for the time being seems to have had the effect of shifting the debate to another field, namely "slaughter policy."

The possible need for a deliberate, controlled reduction of the livestock population had first been seriously discussed in June 1940, when the United Kingdom felt itself to be facing what was rather vaguely described as a "state of siege." There had already been disquieting symptoms of abnormality about livestock marketings during the spring; slaughterings of cattle from February to May had been but three-quarters of normal, those of sheep even less. The usual livestock census of June 4, 1940, confirmed that more and older animals had been retained on farms, indicating that their rate of fattening had been slowed down for want of "concentrated" feedstuffs. There were apprehensions—that proved to be well founded—of a glut of offerings for slaughter in the autumn, and some rather half-hearted adjustments to the seasonal price schedule for cattle were made, on the advice of an *ad hoc* expert Committee, to encourage farmers to hold their animals over till the late winter or early spring.

In the summer of 1940, that is to say, fears were still, as they had been in the autumn of 1939 when the feedstuffs shortage first became apparent, that too many sheep and cattle might be slaughtered rather than too few. In August, moreover, hopes of a considerable import of maize were running high, and the Ministry of Food was inclined to congratulate itself that the livestock population had been successfully maintained. But the sharp and continuing drop of imports in the autumn turned self-congratulation into alarm. In mid-December it was decided that no feedstuffs as such (i.e., apart from the by-products, such as millers' offals and oil-cake, of imports primarily for human consumption) could be imported until the shipping situation had improved. Arrangements for feedstuffs rationing had been in train for some months, and it was now scheduled to begin on February 1, 1941; there was also talk of raising the extraction rate for flour from 76 to 85 percent, which would seriously reduce the supply of wheat offals for livestock. Already there had been a falling off in milk yields, amounting to about one-eighth, as compared with the autumn of 1938. Might this falling off not reach catastrophic proportions in a few months' time, unless emergency steps were taken to reduce the numbers of beef cattle and lowland sheep?

What one may roughly call the "academic" group among the Government's advisers held very strongly that it would. They based their opinion partly on existing trends in milk and meat sales, but mainly on calculations of future feed supplies in relation to the livestock population. On the more favorable of alternative sets of assumptions, they reckoned in March 1941 that in the third year of war there would be sufficient concentrates for but 95 percent of the existing dairy herd, 83 percent of sheep, and 80 percent of beef cattle. It followed that an orderly reduction of livestock to these numbers should be undertaken, if necessary by compulsion. Nor was their confidence in such a policy in any way shaken when a "catastrophic" fall in milk and meat production, forecast by them for the spring of 1941, did not occur.

This view was strongly contested by the other group, the practical administrators, more particularly in the Meat and Livestock Division of the Ministry of Food. They pointed to the absence of complaints from farmers as *prima facie* evidence that the situation could not be so acute as the experts supposed. They argued that the extent to which supplies of feedstuffs existing on farms had been consumed by midwinter had been overstated by the supporters of a slaughter

policy. An experienced livestock auctioneer serving in the Ministry of Food wrote:

I should be the last to suggest that my opinion is more likely to be accurate than the opinion of five leading professors of Agriculture . . . but we may wake up some morning and find we have made a serious mistake. If the cattle are killed there is no means of correcting the error.

Those who agreed with him appeared to be at a disadvantage at this time, not merely because they could not refute with massive calculations the weight of statistical material being brought to bear on the subject, but on account of other, almost fortuitous factors. The most important of these was the acute shortage of meat for the civilian population that set in at Christmas 1940 and caused the ration to fall, within a few weeks, from a slackly enforced 2/2d. to a nominal 1/2d. per head per week. This fall resulted from the coincidence of the end of the unprecedented autumn glut of home-killed meat with a reduction in arrivals from overseas; it was made more sudden, however, by the failure of the Meat and Livestock Division of the Ministry of Food to keep its eye on stocks in cold store, by which it could have spread out the decline over a longer period. Lord Woolton, unaware as it seems of the technical objection to accelerating slaughter—namely, that the beasts killed before their time are likely to be all skin and bone—was naturally inclined to embrace an opportunity of keeping up the meat ration until such time as more shipping could be secured; and perhaps inclined also to discount advice to the contrary from the very officials whose error of judgment had caused him public embarrassment. Nor may the fact that the chief supporters of slaughter were with the Minister in London, while the Meat and Livestock Division was in Colwyn Bay, 200 miles away, have been without effect.

In February 1941 a compromise decision was reached: farmers were to be encouraged, by a combination of price inducements and warnings, to reduce the numbers of their beef cattle, pigs, and poultry. In March, Mr. R. S. Hudson, the Minister of Agriculture for England and Wales, made speeches to rural audiences in support of this policy; in March also the point was rubbed home by an Order of the Ministry of Food prohibiting the feeding of wheat to livestock. Another decision, to restrict the entry of store cattle from Eire, was forestalled by an outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease there, which meant that all stores had to be excluded; and this, by raising store prices (which were uncontrolled) made it impracticable, though also unnecessary, for the Ministry of Food to buy them up for slaughter,

as had been intended. By May it had become clear that the numbers of sheep and pigs, as revealed in the quarterly census of livestock on farms, taken on March 4, were shrinking sufficiently rapidly. Calf slaughterings had also been high, but the experts were worried by the absence of any fall in the numbers of older beef cattle since the previous census. Moreover, they had made fresh calculations, indicating an even greater paper shortage of concentrates than had previously been thought to support a policy of slaughter. Meantime the officials responsible for finding cereals to honor the coupon of the newly introduced feedstuffs rationing scheme, which allocated a definite share to each beast on the farm, feared that the existence of too many animals might bankrupt the scheme.

Those who had all along advocated compulsory slaughter of beef cattle now redoubled their efforts, and they secured from Ministers, early in May, a decision that the Agricultural Departments should make definite plans for the culling of 20 percent of beef herds. (The original proposal for slaughtering sound beasts had, at some stage, been transmuted into one for weeding out wasters.) As a sort of *quid pro quo*, it was agreed that there should also be a culling of unthrifty dairy cows, though the Ministry of Food, unwilling to apply in this case the theory on which it was working in the other, feared that this might lead to a reduction in the output of milk. Fresh powers were conferred on County War Agricultural Executive Committees for this purpose (9, Nos. 795, 929, S.307). But when administrators, for the first time, got down to the practical details of a culling scheme, they found its difficulties daunting. There being no criterion, corresponding to milk yield in cows, by which unthrifty beef animals could be selected, the District W.A.E.C.'s, on whom the task would fall, would be faced with numerous arbitrary and invidious decisions. To visit scores of thousands of farms would take months. The problem of monetary compensation for animals selected for slaughter was a difficult one whose solution might prove costly to the Exchequer. Finally, compulsory slaughter would have to be accompanied by requisition and redistribution of the home-grown feedstuffs it was designed to release—a complicated task that would run clean contrary to the policy, urged upon farmers ever since the war began, that they should make themselves self-supporting in feedstuffs. It would in fact penalize those farmers who had done most in this direction. Moreover, all these measures would have to be taken unsupported by any widespread belief in their necessity.

At the end of June, therefore, the Agricultural Ministers came

back to their colleagues and urged that the compulsory reduction of cattle should not proceed. Experience had not, they argued, borne out the experts' forecasts; a second autumn glut was not to be feared; thanks to the exclusion of Irish store cattle, there were actually too few animals to eat the summer grass. The Minister of Food, whose interest in advocating a slaughter policy had vanished once it became clear that little or no meat for the ration would come out of it, acquiesced; after all, the adjustment of livestock to the feed available was not within his departmental responsibility. Moreover, supplies of imported meat had greatly improved with the spring—a fact that was adduced publicly as the reason for announcing to farmers that accelerated slaughter was no longer desired.

This decision carried with it another—the recasting, with drastic simplifications, of the original feedstuffs rationing scheme. That scheme, introduced only a few months previously, in February 1941, had been based on a calculation by the Agricultural Executive Committees of the requirements of each individual farmer, worked out on a uniform basis—that is to say, in terms of his livestock (as returned in the last quarterly census) and the amount of cereals and pulse that he might be presumed to have grown for them. The allocation of ration coupons in this way had led to some difficulties, for the livestock returns did not distinguish between beef and dairy herds and did not take account of holdings below one acre; moreover, the records of cereal sales by farmers did not provide an up-to-date basis on which their requirements could be assessed. It seems likely that the scheme, as is the way of such things, was too ingeniously complicated and placed too heavy an administrative burden on County Committees. But anyway its basis was now gone. For if each farm animal were to be provided with an individual ration of concentrates, the Government would require to have some sort of control over the numbers of each class of livestock. In the name of the policy of farm self-sufficiency in feedstuffs, and in face of the political and administrative difficulties of compulsory slaughter, the attempt to secure this control had been abandoned. Logically it followed that all farm animals should not be entitled to rations and that, indeed, the numbers to get them should be reduced as far as possible. From October 1941, therefore, ration coupons were issued only to specialist pig and poultry holdings (on a scale drastically reduced compared with their prewar usings); to owners of town horses; to domestic pig and poultry keepers; and to dairy farmers, rations for whose cows were calculated on the basis of their sales to the Milk Marketing

Boards. While farmers might use their home-grown feedstuffs at their own discretion, they had, by a previously mentioned Order of March 1941 (9, No. 319), to surrender all millable wheat for human consumption—a measure which the County War Agricultural Executive Committees were now in a position to enforce, thanks to the knowledge of farms and farmers they had accumulated since the outbreak of war.

Thus was abandoned the first and last effort to execute a planned reduction of livestock in anticipation of a feed shortage. More needs to be said about this episode than that the opponents of the “slaughter policy” turned out to be right in the event. There was in fact no general shortage of fodder from that time on; it seems that the experts had underestimated both the output of grass and the extent to which it was wasted in peacetime. By 1941 farmers were apparently using their grass to better advantage, whether by controlled grazing or by preserving it as hay or ensilage. On the other side of the account, it became evident that the average milch cow could make do with less concentrates than the experts had thought possible; milk yields, the decline in which had caused such alarm in 1940/41, fell only slightly if at all in the third year of war, in spite of a still more restricted supply of concentrates under the rationing scheme. Nor was the improvement checked by the reduction in milling offals after the extraction rate was put up in the spring of 1942. High-yielding cows suffered most from a want of concentrates and protein feed; by contrast, the low-yielders—those that might have been weeded out of the herds if the culling proposals had been put into effect—actually acquired merit as being better able to maintain a useful output of milk on a bulky diet.

The advocates of slaughter, that is to say, underestimated the adaptability of farmers and farm animals and were overrigid in applying the lessons of experience on the Continent of Europe, twenty years previously, which had appeared to give solid backing to what otherwise must have been a rather abstract calculation. In the absence of more immediately relevant practical knowledge, and bearing in mind that the improvements in imports and the cessation of air raids in the spring of 1941 were largely unexpected, one might be tempted to argue that their case was nevertheless the stronger at the time it was put forward and that the *laissez-faire* policy actually adopted was nothing more than a successful gamble. This argument can be disposed of by asking a single question that never seems to have been asked at the time, namely, how much difference to the

feedstuffs budget the slaughter of 20 percent of the beef herd might be expected to make. As the writer has demonstrated elsewhere (10, pp. 175–79) the answer, even on the less sanguine of contemporary calculations, is less than 5 percent, which torpedoed the case for compulsory slaughter from the start. For it could not be claimed either that the calculations were accurate within 5 percent, or that economies of that order could be made with the administrative resources at the Government's disposal.

To continue to press upon Ministers the compulsory slaughter of beef cattle, even after it had been established that pig and sheep numbers were being reduced, was thus to have lost all sense of practical proportion. It was to fall into two of the commonest pitfalls that beset the expert adviser of Government in these fields, namely, to forget first the margin of error in one's statistical calculation and second, the inevitable clumsiness and incapacity for fine adjustment of direct measures of economic control. Slaughter on the scale proposed was too small to be justifiable in theory; in practice it must have combined the maximum disturbance to the farming community with the minimum effect on the situation it set out to remedy. This judgment ought not, however, to be taken to mean that Governments can afford to dispense with scholarship in planning their economic affairs. On the contrary, it was because, with the best of intentions, the advocates of slaughter allowed themselves to depart from a scholarly rigor in analysis, that they went astray.

To the two million extra acres plowed up in the season 1939/40 there had been added more than two and a quarter million in 1940/41, despite unfavorable weather during the plowing and sowing seasons. In the first campaign almost half the new acreage had been planted to oats, and one-sixth to barley; of the crops mainly used for human food only potatoes showed a substantial increase in acreage. With the second campaign, the balance began to shift; a further half million acres were indeed sown to oats, but there were also 450,000 more acres of wheat, and nearly 300,000 acres of potatoes, the only crop for which, as yet, compulsory *directions* were being issued. The harvest of 1941 showed an increase of 20 percent in wheat, and 75 percent in potatoes, over the 1936–38 average. Moreover, despite the reduction in imported feed supplies, the numbers of cattle had been fully maintained, though at some loss in milk output and in the rate of fattening of beef animals. Sheep numbers had fallen by some 15 percent, and were to continue falling, though

more slowly, during the rest of the war. Pig numbers had fallen by nearly one-half; poultry, for reasons to be discussed later, by only about 15 percent. By the standards of the earlier war, this was already an impressive performance; but it was to be far outstripped in later years.

CITATIONS

- 1 The Defence Regulations mainly concerned were Numbers 51, 53, 62, 63, and 85. Powers under these Regulations were delegated to the Executive Committee by the Cultivation of Lands Order, *Statutory Rules and Orders* (hereafter designated S.R.&O.), 1939, No. 1078.
- 2 Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, *National Farm Survey of England and Wales (1941-1943): a Summary Report* (H.M.S.O., 1946).
- 3 Radio Broadcast by the Minister of Agriculture, September 4, 1939; text issued by the Ministry as a Press Notice.
- 4 On November 22, 1939. Ministry of Agriculture Press Notice, No. 100.
- 5 S.R.&O. 1940.
- 6 House of Commons, *Parliamentary Debates*, Fifth Series, Vol. 355, Dec. 14, 1939, col. 1387.
- 7 M. G. Kendall, "The Financing of British Agriculture," *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society* (London), Part II, 1941.
- 8 W. K. Hancock and M. M. Gowing, *British War Economy* (History of the Second World War, U.K. Civil Series, H.M.S.O., 1949).
- 9 S.R.&O. 1941.
- 10 R. J. Hammond, *Food: The Growth of Policy* (History of the Second World War, U.K. Civil Series, H.M.S.O., 1951).

CHAPTER 4

CRISIS AND EXPERIMENT IN CONTROL

THE WINTER OF 1940/41

In September 1940, food imports into the United Kingdom, which during the first year of war had totaled 19 million tons (compared with a prewar average of 22 million), fell abruptly to an annual rate of 15 million tons; by November they were down to a rate of less than 12 million tons. There were various reasons for the fall, of which the least important, in the short run, was the increased activity of German submarines. One of the more important was the diversion of ships to other destinations than Great Britain (more especially the Near East), to military use, and to the Ministry of Supply's program. In particular, ships that might have been used for wheat from North America were used for steel instead. Steel is a bad cargo to carry because it is difficult to stow and is liable to shift in heavy weather; the attempt to carry it on the North Atlantic route in the worst months of the year was at least partly responsible for the large number of ships that had to be laid up for repair that winter and so were lost for the time being to the United Kingdom's importing capacity.

Yet another cause of reduced imports, that might have been more influential but for the concomitant fall of arrivals in British harbors, was the port congestion that arose, more particularly in the Clyde and Mersey, and that was the product of two principal converging influences. On the one hand, the east coast ports, as the most vulnerable to enemy attack, were deliberately forbidden to most ocean-going ships, including all refrigerated ships, and these had to be handled on the west. On the other hand, the smooth working of the railways, which was in any case bound to be upset by the switching of imports, was also greatly impeded by the continual night bombing, first of London, the center of the railway network, and then of other towns, throughout the autumn and winter. (The effect of bombing on the west coast ports themselves, more particularly Merseyside, was in comparison negligible, as measured by the movement of ships in and out.) These causes were exacerbated at first by lack of organization in the west coast ports themselves, though this fault

was largely remedied by Government action, in particular the appointment, at the beginning of 1941, of Regional Port Directors for the Clyde, Mersey, and Bristol Channel groups of ports.

For these difficulties the Ministry of Food was, operationally speaking, well prepared; frozen meat alone among its major commodities suffered acute delays for a time, mainly on account of an apparent shortage of insulated rail waggons for transporting the meat from west coast ports to cold stores in London and the east. These stores had still to be used, although the ports themselves were closed to refrigerated shipping, because there was not enough accommodation on the west coast for all the meat now being imported through it. The shortage of waggons was rightly diagnosed as being a problem of management rather than supply; it disappeared almost overnight when the Ministry of Food and the railways jointly organized a wagon-pooling scheme, controlled from a single center, in November 1940. Nowhere did port congestion, or bombing, bring about a shortage of any major food to the extent that the ration could not be met. (Indeed, except for the special case of meat in the early part of 1941, this was true of all Ministry-controlled foods at all times.)

There was another sense, however, in which the Ministry was wholly, or almost wholly, unprepared for the fall in imports. It had resolutely refused, with the backing of the Prime Minister himself, to make a 15-million-ton import program the basis of its policy. It had hitherto limited its control activities, whether over imports, prices, or consumption, to staples such as meat, sugar, oils and fats, wheat, tea, and potatoes; it was moving slowly and perhaps reluctantly toward the rationing of animal feedstuffs, but had not seriously contemplated extending its activities to the multitude of lesser foods that would be affected by such import shortages as now threatened. Although it had called upon the advice of experts in nutrition, steps had not as yet been taken to translate the general principles they had laid down into a practical and comprehensive policy, aimed at providing the public with a civilized wartime diet, bearing at least a general resemblance to the customary prewar one. The so-called "basal diet," propounded by the scientists in the summer of 1940, was too austere to be generally palatable, and, as officials hastened to show, was impracticable in many respects. "Consumption policy" had yet to achieve a middle course between the naïvetés of the nutrition expert turned planner and the improvisations natural to "practical" administrators and businessmen (see chapter 8).

During this period of crisis one can detect several influences at

work in food policy. The first, and perhaps at all times the most important, was the need to cope with pressing day-to-day problems and shortages, whether of meat for the ration or of lesser things like onions and candy. A second influence was anxiety about the food value of the national diet; the Government's scientific advisers feared shortages of protein, of vitamin A, and of vitamin C. A third may perhaps best be described as a latent desire for reform, now stimulated into hopeful activity by the deteriorating import situation and by the philanthropic outlook of the Minister of Food himself. By common consent the name of Lord Woolton, who became Minister in the dying weeks of the Chamberlain government, and remained, under Mr. Churchill, until November 1943 when he became Minister of Reconstruction, must always be associated with the heroic period of food control. He found his Ministry established, it is true, as a going concern, but little regarded by the public at large; he left it as a popular success so great that the work of those who actually brought it into existence is often overlooked. Like Lord Rhondda in 1917, he "set up a press barrage of favourable opinion behind which his department could work without disturbance" (1); and this in itself was a great contribution to its administrative success, as the postwar years of food control, undertaken without benefit of it, clearly demonstrate.

Apart from this successful projection of his personality, and hence of his Department, before the public eye, it is not altogether easy to particularize Lord Woolton's influence on its work, for all that it was continually exercised. His administrative innovations were few; the most important of those with which he should largely, it seems, be credited was the creation of a "General Department" in the Ministry, that should co-ordinate the day-to-day work of administration with wider considerations of policy. He himself seems to have set store by another reform, the placing of responsibility for the supply of particular foodstuffs on the commodity directors drawn from the trade, headed by a "Commercial Secretary" who had himself been a commodity director. By this change the Minister hoped to remove the reproach, and what he believed to be the inefficiency, of bureaucratic methods associated with the civil servants who had hitherto shared responsibility with the commodity "czars." But the inefficiency he had in mind had been attributable to individuals rather than to the system as a whole; the possibility of applying prewar business criteria to wartime control was, by mid-1941, becoming more and more remote; and in short, the apotheosis of the

businessman within the Ministry coincided with limitations on his freedom of action far more stringent, because imposed by circumstances, than any for which mere "red tape" could be held responsible. Contrariwise, the pressures of war were to modify the civil service habits of thought and action that undoubtedly irked the Minister during his early months of office. By the end of his term, Minister, career officials, recruits to the Ministry from business and elsewhere, had established a *modus vivendi* satisfactory both to themselves and to the public they served. It was natural, however, that one new to the processes of departmental administration should be less than patient with them at first, and should look more hopefully than critically at new methods and seeming short cuts.

There was, that is to say, during most of 1940 and 1941, a certain want of integration about the Ministry's thinking—an unresolved conflict of aims and methods that, while not much affecting the day-to-day administration of existing controls, showed itself in an uncertain, not to say erratic, approach to new ones. On the one hand, the Ministry responded slowly and reluctantly to the call, from both within and without official circles, that it should undertake large extensions of rationing. Its first actual moves in that direction, a "minimum share" scheme for preserves and an attempt to limit the amount of milk that any one household might buy, were failures because they were not thoroughgoing enough. On the other hand, its proposals for the compulsory slaughter of one-fifth of the country's beef cattle, and the marketing of carrots and onions through an *ad hoc* company, were supported by arguments plausible rather than convincing. It would not be fair to regard the second of these, that took shape as the "National Vegetable Marketing Company," as typical of all the Ministry of Food's activity at this time. But neither should it be passed over as an unimportant aberration, such as the ablest may fall into and subsequently retrieve. For it reveals all the influences that have been noted as shaping food policy just then: nutritional worries, impatience with civil service methods, and the desire to cope with shortages that were arousing public complaint.

CARROT AND ONION MARKETING

In the summer of 1940 the committee of scientists, headed by the President of the Royal Society, that had been called in to advise the War Cabinet on food policy, had recommended among other things that there should be a large increase in the acreage of carrots, which were said to be rich in the protective vitamin A, easy to store

in clamps, and cheap to grow in large quantities. This proposal had two important implications. In the first place, the Government would have to provide an assured market and a guaranteed price to growers; otherwise, no more carrots would be sown than were likely to satisfy the existing demand. Second, it would have to see that the carrots were consumed; this meant an advertising campaign and also, in all probability, a subsidy. It so happened, however, that at the same time as the Ministry of Food undertook to plan for a glut of carrots, it was also facing the certainty of an acute shortage of onions, almost all United Kingdom supplies of which normally come from overseas. In the autumn and winter of 1940/41 their shortage and high price led to many complaints—so many, indeed, that the Ministry allowed itself to be stampeded into issuing a price control Order (2). As one might expect, this only drove onions "under the counter"; control of distribution was therefore logically the next step, granted that there was any need for the first one.

Although the problems of distributing carrots and onions both arose from the fact of war, they were otherwise completely independent. They were, however, to become administrative yokefellows partly from mere coincidence in time, partly because they typified, though in opposite ways, the objections that a whole generation of would-be reformers had raised to existing methods of vegetable marketing in the United Kingdom. Among such it had become common form to point on the one hand to the way prices soared in time of scarcity, on the other to the "waste" that resulted in time of glut, when the prices vegetables would fetch in the shops would not cover the cost of distribution, and they had to be thrown away or plowed in. In October 1940 Lord Woolton appointed a Departmental Committee to inquire once again into the general question of vegetable marketing. There was little fresh ground of principle that the Committee could break, and the practical possibilities of reform were circumscribed still further by war conditions, including the existence of an all-party Government. About carrots and onions, however, the Government was by then bound to do something; here, as it seems, the reformers saw their opportunity. They proposed the setting up of a public corporation, financed by, and under the general direction of, the Ministry of Food, to conduct a large-scale experiment in carrot and onion distribution.

The Ministry of Food already had in existence control machinery, working through the trade, that could readily have dealt with both carrots and onions. The proposal to establish alongside the Divisions

respectively controlling Fruit and Vegetables, and Potatoes, an entirely new organization of a quasi-commercial character, was defended on the ground that it would secure greater rapidity of decision, flexibility of organization, and freedom in staff matters, than could be readily attained in a Government department. Considerations of this sort had already influenced the commodity controls; for instance, imported meat and bacon were marketed through organizations of established traders, created by the Ministry of Food for that very reason.

The device of a public corporation has become a favorite one with those who wish to reconcile Government control of this or that economic activity with the avoidance of "bureaucracy." It had obvious attractions for a philanthropic businessman like Lord Woolton, who might well have been more critical of a proposal that the Ministry should itself directly take over carrot and onion marketing. (Compare, after the war, the unanimous endorsement by all political parties of the East African groundnuts scheme, run by a similar corporation.) However, the device has in general been employed where the day-to-day business of the corporation, as with nationalized gas and electricity undertakings, can be reasonably said to be independent of Government policy.

The same might be said of the distribution of carrots and onions—under peacetime conditions. Then a National Vegetable Marketing Company might reasonably have been left to work out its own salvation. But the situation in 1941 was quite different. The Marketing Company was then established as an instrument of a policy predetermined—to distribute scarce onions under a quasi rationing scheme, to make the best use of a plethora of carrots. Even in the carrying out of the policy, the Company must resort to Ministry assistance at every turn—in the procurement of staff, offices, equipment, and rationed motor spirit. Nor could the Ministry allow the Company a free hand in such matters as the fixing of traders' profit margins, in case overgenerosity should undermine the principles on which they had been fixed for other controlled foods.

Thus, from the very foundation of the Company, in April 1941, its relations with the parent Department were unhappy and equivocal. The Directors, who on appointment had been led to believe that they would have a large measure of independence, tended to resent the mildest of Ministry criticism; officials for their part found the Directors wanting in understanding of the overriding requirements of Ministry policy, more especially for carrots. Many of them had

advised against its establishment; their restraint in open comment was accompanied by increasing misgiving.

The issue between officials and Company was fundamentally this: how far was it necessary deliberately to organize carrot and onion marketing? The Company was to be the sole purchaser of all main-crop carrots and onions grown for sale in the season 1941/42 by any holder of as little as one acre of land, no matter how remote from markets and means of transport. Its responsibility for onions would begin in July; for carrots, on November 1. Since onions and carrots were not among the crops whose location was planned through the C.W.A.E.C.'s, it was all the more necessary, thought officials, that the Company should devise as rapidly as possible a scheme for collecting them from growers. The expected surplus of carrots, moreover, would call for supervision of clamping, with selection of long-keeping varieties, and an orderly disposals policy starting from the very beginning of the season. (The carrot problem, in fact, bore close resemblance to that of potatoes; and the eventual handing over of carrot control to the Potato Division was logical.)

The Company took an easier, a more commercial, view of its responsibilities. While it set up an elaborate organization of area and subarea controllers who were to direct marketing, it proposed, at any rate at first, to leave responsibility for bagging and transporting onions on the grower. Later it did undertake to supply bags; but by that time the weather had assumed the chief role in the disposal of the onion crop. August 1941 was wet and chilly, so that about one-third of the crop either failed outright, or developed into "bull-necked" onions, unfit for storage. Bags on the way to the grower were often delayed on rail. In addition, the Company's instructions for despatch were held up by the operation of the "reservation" scheme, by which the Ministry had undertaken to use the rationing machinery for allocating onions to the consumer. People were to "reserve" their onions by giving their names to their retailer, and his supplies would be based on the number of reservations he received. A single week was allowed in which reservations might take place. But the chosen week fell in September, when many people are away on holiday; and so great was the resulting complaint that the Ministry decided to extend the period of reservation for two more weeks. As the Company would not allot any onions to an area until all the vouchers in respect of reservations had been received, growers could not be told where to send them until the process was complete. Many, it was alleged, were forced to stand by and see

deteriorate from week to week a crop that, but for control, they could have sold locally at a good price. Such grievances would have been easy for the Ministry to answer if, as a result of control, the consumer had enjoyed an equitable and sizable share of the onion crop. But the share, although fair, was so small as to be derisory; the initial pound of onions per head that had been promised turned out, even with some assistance from imported supplies, to be the last.

The same weather that had been responsible for the loss of so many onions helped to produce a mammoth crop of carrots, estimated at 450,000 tons—half as much again as that of 1940, itself nearly double that of 1939. The Company had made no advance plans for dealing with the glut, except that there was to be a carrot advertising campaign by the Ministry's public relations division. It had no ordered scheme for moving carrots off the farms; so far from taking steps to make them cheaper in the shops, it began by intervening to hold wholesale prices *up*, to a level corresponding to the retail price of 2*d.* a pound. The Company argued that no more would be sold if the price were lower, a view which, however sound it might prove to be in practice, was completely contrary to the beliefs and hopes that had led to the Company's being established. Lord Woolton's chosen instrument had become not merely ineffective, but recalcitrant.

Hence, even before its first full season had ended, the Minister was being advised to end the experiment. The National Farmers' Union criticized the Company as oppressive and inefficient; but its Directors, so far from admitting any need for reform in their organization, refused to modify it in the direction of more comprehensive control, while at the same time suggesting that they should handle more commodities in following seasons. The Minister eventually decided that there was nothing to be done with the Company. On March 26, 1942, Parliament was told that it would be wound up as soon as it had finished with the carrot crop for that season.

In November and December 1941, the first two months of controlled marketing, the movement of carrots off farms had actually been slower, it was reckoned, than in the previous year. Officials looked forward to a heavy trading loss, inasmuch as large quantities would have to be sold for stockfeed. (Elaborate experiments in processing the roots led, practically speaking, nowhere.) But the weather this time came to the rescue, at any rate of the Treasury. Severe frosts in January and February 1942 destroyed a large part of the crop before it could be lifted; and since farmers had not taken

the precaution of offering their carrots to the Company in advance (in which case they might have held it legally liable to pay for them), the problem of disposal was reduced to comparatively slight proportions; only some 25,000 tons, out of a total Company turnover of some 175,000, was sold for animal feeding. Even so, it accounted for nearly one-half of the estimated trading losses. (On onions the Company had made a sizable profit, enough to cover its total administrative expenses.) A loss of £400,000, compared with the £1,400,000 that had been expected, seemed an inexpensive escape, even though to it should be added the advertising costs of the "carrot campaign." But, of course, it had only been made at the cost of frustrating the purpose for which the Company had been established, namely, promoting the consumption by human beings of as many carrots as possible. It appears, indeed, that there was literally nothing to show for the money that had been spent—that both carrot supplies and consumption were virtually the same as in the previous year, when there had been no control at all.

The episode of the National Vegetable Marketing Company was closed; but the Ministry of Food was none the less firmly committed to active intervention with both onion and carrot distribution. "Reservation" of onions was dropped, and after two more seasons of partial control, in 1942 and 1943, the Ministry left them alone altogether; oddly enough, although supplies never came anywhere near the prewar level, the public seems to have got used to their absence. Carrots were handed over to the Division dealing with potatoes, and run on the same lines, namely, by Ministry purchase of only the surplus in any given year. The acreage continued high, though the crop never again achieved the fantastic proportions of 1941. The substitution of a more fitting instrument of policy for the ill-starred Company leaves open, however, the question of whether the policy itself was really necessary. The writer's view is that, for all the admitted food value of carrots, the case for a guaranteed price and subsidy had not been made out—that supplies and consumption were already sufficiently high in 1940, and that the whole "carrot campaign" must be said to belong to the naïve period of food control, when one had only to say that this or that crop contained a vitamin to make people conclude that the country could not possibly have too much of it. This view is reinforced by later research both on the availability of the carotene in carrots and on the requirements of vitamin A in human beings, from which it appears that the scientists' clamor for more and more carrots overestimated both the

danger for which insurance was sought and the cover given by carrots against it.

EGGS

The brief but lively career of the National Vegetable Marketing Company almost coincided in point of time with the first stage of a more important experiment—a distribution scheme for eggs, home-produced as well as imported, which began in July 1941.

Apart from some disturbance in the first few weeks of war, imports of eggs had been well maintained until the German conquests of 1940. Therefore the Ministry of Food, in the autumn of 1939, had stopped short of what had been the original intention to introduce complete control of imported eggs. The Ministry did become the sole importer of eggs from Australia and South Africa under bulk contracts, and it also made some "political" purchases in the Balkans. The normally more important part of the trade, from Denmark, the Netherlands, and other "near-European" sources, was left to private traders under Open General Import Licence. Prices were at first controlled only at the wholesale and retail stages, but as this led to maldistribution through importers attempting to realize wholesale prices for sales at first hand, these also were subjected to price control after a few weeks. Even so, the trouble was only remedied because an all-round increase in controlled prices coincided with an improvement in supplies.

For home-produced eggs, control of producers' prices, together with the control of distribution that it would entail, had always been considered impracticable; and what might have been the nucleus for such a control—the voluntary marketing scheme for graded home produce bearing the "National Mark"—had been suspended for eggs, as for other commodities, as an economy measure at the outbreak of war. The confusion brought about by partial price control in the home-produced, as in the imported, trade could therefore only be remedied by the lifting of control, and this was accordingly done in December 1939.

Nevertheless, price control was hastily reimposed in May 1940, shortly after the Germans invaded the Low Countries; and this time it was confined to retail prices. With three-quarters of imported supplies cut off, this hasty gesture was not long in producing chaos in the trade. By July it had become impossible for retailers to make any profit at all on home-produced eggs without breaking the law,

for firsthand and wholesale prices had risen to the controlled retail price level.

The Ministry of Food was not yet willing, let alone ready, to attempt comprehensive measures of control. "Eggs," Lord Woolton told a questioner at a press conference on June 3, 1940, "are not regarded as an essential food." Indeed, poultry had already been set lowest in the scale of priorities for animal feedstuffs. But it was not likely that the public's belief in the virtues of eggs, or its desire for them, would diminish by reason of the Minister's *ipse dixit*. The cynical would account for their being decried by their scarcity, even as the official praise of carrots was later attributed to their plenty (with only partial justice). The example of home-grown oats, moreover, had already shown that the case for controlling a food could not be made to rest on an official notion, however well-founded, of its intrinsic importance.

However, an attempt was made in the autumn of 1940 to improve distribution by combining Ministry control of imported eggs with a partial, voluntary marketing scheme for home-produced eggs. Under the latter, a producer who sold to an officially licensed grading and packing station would be paid a trifle more than the legal maximum he could get for eggs sold without grading to the consumer direct. Packing stations were to get a special "balancing payment" (derived from a hidden levy on imported eggs, now the monopoly of the Ministry) for sales to wholesalers instead of to retailers direct. Supplies that would as a result (it was hoped) be diverted into wholesale channels could then be directed to the large towns, where the shortage was worst.

This scheme was not a success. Not only was there no actual inducement to packers to break existing trade connections (the balancing payment did no more than set off the financial loss they would incur by doing so); but the incentive to producers to send their eggs to packing stations was negligible, even apart from the fact that it was quite easy for them to get more than the controlled price by direct sales to consumers or perhaps above all to catering establishments, which could resell eggs as part of a meal free of price control (as yet). One might, indeed, say that the only effect was to raise the price of imported eggs by sixpence a dozen. The Ministry's Eggs Division was driven to conclude that there must be compulsion, both of producers to sell to packing stations, and of packing stations to send their eggs where the Ministry should direct.

Meantime a more effective egg control was being urged in other official quarters. The introduction of feedstuffs rationing led to a suggestion that supplies of feedstuffs to commercial egg producers should be related to their deliveries to packing stations. A Ministry of Food Committee, appointed early in 1941 to consider the distribution of unrationed foods, named eggs as one of the main sources of complaint and urged in particular that measures be taken to secure adequate supplies to consumers deserving priority, such as children and expectant mothers. More decisive than these arguments, however, was the Treasury's alarm at the continual rise in egg prices, on account of its effect on the monthly cost-of-living index. During the winter of 1940/41 a thoroughgoing policy of price stabilization had at length been accepted and was to be avowed in the budget speech of 1941. Such a policy was only feasible if price control could be applied to all the items in the index, in which eggs were weighted out of all proportion to the supplies available in wartime.

This overweighting of eggs provided a key to the administrative problem. It meant that a subsidy, designed to reduce the controlled retail price compared with the price offered by the packing station to the producer, might persuade him of the advantages of complying with the law; at the same time, because eggs were scarce, the cost to the Exchequer of keeping down the index by a subsidy on them would be much less, per "point," than if the subsidy were, for example, on bread, the consumption of which had gone up since the war began. The Treasury therefore even went so far as to urge the Ministry to hasten in producing the new control scheme, so that it might be ready by July 1, 1941, when another calculation of the index was due.

As so often happens in public administration, a leisurely, reluctant tempo of preparation had to be suddenly transformed into a headlong rush to meet a deadline fixed on extraneous grounds, and this haste was all but fatal to the scheme. It was not that its principle was unsound, but that time was not granted to deal with the quasi-political obstacles that were bound to arise when any large extension of control was contemplated. So far as distributors were concerned there was little difficulty. Egg traders were ready, indeed anxious, for a more satisfactory control, one that would, in fact, ensure them some eggs to handle. The only problem was to determine the basis for allocation to the retailer, since the uncertainty and irregularity of supplies made a definite ration out of the question. Eventually it was decided to tie consumers to retailers (as in a full rationing scheme) and to allow every retailer eggs in proportion to his regis-

tered customers, but not to guarantee a ration, nor to undertake simultaneous allocation to all parts of the country. Under pressure from the trade, the Ministry reluctantly undertook to announce the beginning of each complete allocation, thus making it possible for the consumer to insist that the retailer play fair. Though no formal obligation to supply, such as existed for rationed foods, was placed on the retailer, the distribution scheme for eggs did in practice approximate to a full rationing system, and eggs were commonly spoken of (though not by the Ministry) as being "rationed"; from July 1942 onward a ration-book page was provided expressly for them.

All these arrangements, involving the licensing of all dealers in eggs, could of themselves do nothing to secure that there were eggs in the shops. That depended on the effectiveness of the control, which in its turn depended as much on what was attempted as on what was accomplished. It had from the first been obvious that producers could not be prevented from retaining enough of their eggs for their own household consumption, and that many—whether because they did not produce for sale, because they were remote from packing stations or transport facilities, or simply because their flocks were too small—would have to be exempt. But in determining the extent of these exemptions there were two opposite pitfalls. If the Ministry attempted to collect too many eggs—if, for instance, it followed the example of the Six Counties of Northern Ireland and compelled all commercial producers however small to use the packing stations—it would, apart from political troubles, put too great a strain on the physical resources, such as transport, at its disposal. (It would also have to undertake the arduous task of distributing a "Government issue" of eggs in remote districts that were better left to look after themselves.) If, on the other hand, the net of control were cast too narrowly, the Ministry would find itself confronted with the worst type of black market—the one that is perfectly legal.

In discussion with the Agricultural Departments, the line for general, as distinct from local, exemption had been drawn at flocks of 25 birds, thus leaving outside the scheme not only the "domestic" poultry keeper proper, but also the "small" poultry keeper who might be presumed to be supplying a purely local market. However, as a result of meeting with producers' representatives shortly before the scheme was due to be introduced, officials gained the impression that a reduction of the limit to 12 birds would be acceptable, and this amendment was hastily embodied in the scheme. What was more, the Ministry of Food insisted, despite an urgent plea from the

Agricultural Departments, on formally requiring a "controlled" producer to surrender *all* his eggs to the Ministry. (He might, it was conceded at the eleventh hour, be permitted to retain a strictly limited number on application to the local Food Office.) Both within and without Government circles there arose a wave of sympathy for the small producer with 13 birds or more; the Prime Minister intervened in condemnation of the scheme. So great was the clamor that the Agricultural Departments abandoned their previous assent to the 25-bird limit, claiming that as a first step the limit should be 50 birds; and this view was now upheld by Ministers. The only restriction imposed on the man with 50 birds or less was that he should not sell to caterers, or to persons buying for resale.

This last-minute emasculation of a scheme, final preparations for which had already been made in undue haste, caused the officials who would have to work it much misgiving. But the initial public odium into which it fell was due, not to the exemptions, but to an unrelated piece of bad luck. The Ministry had planned to launch the scheme with an allocation of imported eggs, mainly from the United States and Canada. Many of these eggs, unknown to the traders who had to handle them, had been in cold store for months before shipment, and their distribution coincided with a heat wave. Numbers of them went bad, and since they bore no mark of origin, this was largely blamed on the Ministry, as it was supposed that home-produced eggs were being held up in packing stations. The remainder of the imported eggs had to be withdrawn from the allocation and sold as "cooking eggs" at a cut price. To the complaint that the Ministry was distributing bad eggs then succeeded the complaint that there were not enough eggs, for the withdrawal of the imports coincided with the normal seasonal fall in home laying. By December the Prime Minister was telling Lord Woolton that the scheme was a failure, for "the scarcity of eggs is palpable" (3, p. 838). The *non sequitur* in this remark was hardly less so, but it indicates very well the nature of public reaction to the Ministry's egg policy. The man in the street did not accept the shortage of eggs as a phenomenon inevitable in wartime, and he expected the Minister of Food to do something about it.

Apart from supplying dried egg in quantity, plans for which were already under way, the Ministry found itself unable to do much that was effective. In the summer of 1942 the control scheme was tightened up in two ways: by reducing the exemption limit from 50 hens to the 25 originally proposed, and by compelling all poultry

keepers to surrender their right to buy eggs in a shop. In order to restrict the supply of feedstuffs to the exempted poultry keepers, these were now to obtain "balancer meal" coupons against the surrender of individual egg registrations, at the rate of one hen's allowance for each member of the household; persons wishing to buy eggs from exempted producers might obtain balancer meal for their suppliers' hens on the same terms. In addition, the spread between the controlled retail and the (higher) packing station prices was widened, from March 1942, to 1s. 1d. a dozen. One measure that might or might not have proved effective in getting more eggs into packing stations—the linking of commercial producers' feedstuffs rations to egg deliveries—was mooted on several occasions, but never introduced during the war on account of administrative and political difficulties. As it was, the most that these measures can be said to have done was to prevent a more substantial fall in the number of eggs passing through packing stations. Only in the spring of 1945, when rather more feedstuffs were made available, did the curve of sales at last show signs of turning upward.

It was variously estimated that from one-third to one-half of home-produced eggs, other than those produced by domestic poultry keepers, escaped control, legally or otherwise. Such estimates are uncertain, for the number of eggs actually produced can only be guessed at; but that the black market was large may be inferred from the price, as low sometimes as five shillings a dozen, at which eggs were said to be available in country districts. That this should be so was inherent in the nature of the commodity, and cannot be blamed on the scheme itself, which, bearing in mind limitations of transport and manpower, particularly for enforcement, was probably as good as could be devised. The imperfections of egg control are in fact only the extreme case of the general principle that a wholly satisfactory and watertight scheme can only be created under conditions that render it unnecessary, i.e., in time of peace and plenty.

It is tempting to argue that the expenditure of much energy, and some ten to fifteen million sterling annually, on distributing 30 eggs, or five shillings worth, per "nonpriority" head per year was an unjustifiable waste of public money, and that it would have been better to let eggs alone. Even the "priority classes" could have done without them. But to argue thus is to ignore the whole context of egg control. No British Minister of Food in 1941, least of all Lord Woolton, could have stood aside from a problem, however intractable, about which the public felt so strongly. Eggs were not, like carrots and perhaps

even potatoes, something with which the Ministry busied itself of its own volition, amid general public indifference; their importance in the cost-of-living index was a catalyst, rather than a prime mover, in bringing the control scheme about. After all, the Government, by fixing a scale of priorities for livestock products—milk first, eggs last—that accorded not with public opinion but with that of its experts, had itself a share in producing the egg shortage. It could not reasonably expect to determine in advance the limits of the administrative intervention to which that decision might lead.

FISH

The same influences shaped the Government's policy toward fresh fish. For many months after the fiasco of the 1939 distribution scheme, the Ministry of Food had been chary of tackling the problem over again. The various sections of the trade—trawler owners, coastal merchants, wholesalers, retailers, and fish fryers—were reluctant to co-operate either with each other or with the Ministry in restraining price rises and controlling distribution. Thanks to Admiralty requisitioning of fishing vessels for minesweeping and the closing of certain fishing grounds, landings of white fish and herrings in the first six months of war had fallen to less than half the figure for the corresponding period in the previous year. The average price of white fish had doubled, the greatest increases being in the cheaper kinds and particularly those used by fried-fish shops. Herrings, both fresh and cured, were alone subjected to price control, in November 1939; for the rest, Ministry efforts were directed toward increasing supplies of fish, particularly to fryers, by encouraging the import of frozen cod fillets from Newfoundland.

In the first year of war the scarcity and high price of fish evoked little public complaint, and only the fish fryers, among trade interests, were anxious for control. The winter of 1940/41, with its shortages of meat and virtually all uncontrolled foods, made the fish position, which was still getting worse, something that the Government could no longer ignore. By February 1941 the price of cod at the ports was nearly five times the prewar average. The Treasury, alarmed at the effect of these high prices on the cost-of-living index, pressed the Ministry of Food to introduce price control. The Ministry, however, was reluctant to move except in so far as it could carry the trade with it; and the trade, though several sections of it were no longer as hostile to control as they had been a year earlier, was still disunited.

Only after many discussions did a Committee, representing all the various trade interests, agree to a first step toward control. This was the establishment of a voluntary system of allocation of Icelandic cod, coupled with control of its price at all stages of distribution. So little, however, did the trade Committee count on the co-operation of those it represented, that it asked the Ministry of Food to embody the proposed maximum prices in a formal Order—a request that was accepted only with hesitation and misgiving, inasmuch as the prices put forward by the trade were such as the Ministry would find it difficult to defend in public. Moreover, the Order would not be strictly enforceable, since there was no way by which the consumer could distinguish between Icelandic cod and that caught by British fishermen.

By the time the Order came into force, on March 29, 1941, it was clear that it could only be a temporary measure; the trade had, indeed, already agreed to the extension of control, first to all cod and then to other kinds of fish. On April 7 the Chancellor of the Exchequer, in his budget speech, announced the adoption of a general policy of price stabilization which made imperative not only the control of fish prices, but their substantial reduction; all the more so since it was desired to offset the seasonal rise in potato prices that would occur, with the new crop, in July. The leisurely pace of negotiations with the fish trade was too much for the Treasury, which was even prepared to subsidize fish in order to keep the cost-of-living index level. The Ministry of Food, which regarded the policy of rigid index stabilization as both foolish in itself and a great nuisance from the administrative point of view, was forced to introduce a general Order controlling fish prices (4) before its plans for control of distribution were ready. As an interim measure, however, it undertook to bear the carriage charges on all fish for the next three months, thus reducing the price to the consumer and removing the incentive to the port wholesaler to despatch his allocations of fish only to nearby towns. After September 25, 1941, transport costs were met out of a levy on all firsthand sales of fish at the ports; at the same time certain reductions were made in the prices that had been fixed in the interim schedule.

Thus far the Ministry of Food had accomplished no more than the minimum required to keep the cost-of-living index from rising. Control of distribution, the imperative corollary of price control, was still limited to allocation at the ports; inequities in distribution inland, more particularly between one area and another, exacerbated

the general shortage. The problem of reform was, however, intractable, as was the industry; the officials charged with the task were, almost inevitably, cautious and apprehensive of failure. One may, indeed, doubt whether anything more would have been done, but for the sustained pressure that was now put upon the Ministry's Fish Division to end, in accordance with the declared policy of the Government on transport economy, the wasteful long- and cross-haulage that characterized the movement of fish by rail (5).

The journeys of fish about the country presented a fantastic and intricate network, derived from prewar trade connections that—in so far as they were not purely accidental and haphazard—arose largely from the varying regional preferences for species of fish, cutting across the natural pattern of landings. Thus fish landed at Cardiff was sent across the country to the great fishing port of Grimsby, while at the same time Cardiff was receiving almost daily supplies from the Lancashire port of Fleetwood. Fish was sent from Northern Ireland to Glasgow, and received in Belfast from Aberdeen and Fleetwood. Fleetwood sent fish daily by rail to the east coast towns of Newcastle, Middlesbrough, Hull, and Grimsby; Grimsby, to Preston, Blackpool, and Southport, which were all within a few miles of Fleetwood. It was not the distance represented by these journeys that mattered so much as the cross-haulage and the congestion of junctions and marshaling yards that they meant. What made them more objectionable was that fish, being perishable, was able to claim the highest traffic priority.

The Ministry of Food admitted, of course, that something would have to be done about this state of affairs; but it hoped for some time that the fish traders would themselves devise a scheme. By April 1942, however, it was clear that the trade would initiate nothing that would meet the transport authorities' wishes, and the Ministry thereupon decided to put its own scheme into force. Even so, difficulty in obtaining information from the trade, and prolonged negotiations with it in which the Minister himself took part, delayed the introduction of the scheme until October.

The principle of the White Fish Zoning Scheme, which, as its name implies, excluded herrings, mackerel, pilchards, and sprats, was the restriction of movements from a particular port to its hinterland, which was defined by reference to population, estimated landings, and railway facilities. There were five main zones, related respectively to Fleetwood, Milford Haven, Grimsby, Hull, and Aberdeen—Northern Ireland making a sixth. London was treated sepa-

ately and might receive its supplies from any port; Birmingham, by reason of its size, was allowed two ports—Grimsby and Fleetwood. Each zone was divided into subzones, between which supplies would be shared in proportion to the population; special provision was made for priority supplies to hospitals and similar institutions.

The scheme meant, of course, a complete rearrangement of existing trade connections. Henceforward not only port wholesalers, but inland wholesalers, retailers, and fish fryers came within the allocation system; and wholesalers might only supply customers on an approved list. The Ministry appointed Fish Distribution Officers in the main ports and at its Divisional Offices; it also set up Distribution Committees, representing the trade, but each with an independent chairman, to make the necessary adjustments. But in spite of the exhaustive consultation that had marked the preparations, the introduction of the scheme was accompanied by the most violent uproar on the part of all sections of the trade, quite openly aimed at smashing it, as the original scheme of September 1939 had been smashed. In the whole history of wartime food control there is no parallel for such organized irresponsibility on behalf of a sectional interest. For more than a month the Ministry was assailed with letters and resolutions, culminating in a unanimous call from the representative *Fish Industry Joint Council*, for the scheme's withdrawal.

Secure in its possession of public favor, the Ministry stood firm. Lord Woolton decided to intervene personally; on December 8, 1942, he told the trade roundly and publicly that he would not tolerate obstruction and sabotage. In the House of Commons, a few days later, the Parliamentary Secretary (Mr. William Mabane) outlined equally firmly the course of the negotiations and the reasons, chief among them the crying need to economize in transport, that had led the Ministry to introduce the scheme. The agitation thereupon collapsed; and the trade, which had condemned the scheme as unworkable, agreed to discuss amendments with officials. In substance, it was to continue in existence until after the end of hostilities. Certain adjustments were made in zone boundaries by an Order of April 1943; in November 1944 further changes were made to deal with shifts in the proportion of fish landed at each of the five principal ports. But these did not affect the principle.

The primary purpose of fish zoning—the saving of transport—was certainly accomplished. As a means of securing equal distribution of fish *per capita*—at which the Ministry had aimed—it was not so successful and, despite amendments, seems to have become

less so as time went on. The original figures of population, on which the proportionate allocations had been based, became increasingly out of date. Landings of fish, though generally on the upgrade, varied from port to port and were impossible to forecast. Some areas, notably South Wales and Northern Ireland, failed to take up their allocations—a fact that called in question the wisdom of the original equalitarian assumption on which these were based. Last, but not least, the trade, which had swallowed the scheme perforce, was seldom if ever fully co-operative with the Ministry's local officers. In September 1945, therefore, the Ministry relaxed the zoning arrangements considerably; and on March 2, 1946, they were abandoned altogether. Since, however, price control remained in force, the allocation system in the ports was continued, together with a modified distribution scheme that required merchants to give priority to their "registered" customers.

Although successive Costings reports from 1943 onward revealed that the profits of trawler owners, even under control, were inordinately high, little progress was made during the remainder of the war in reducing the level of fish prices. In June 1943 the average retail price of all types of white fish was reduced by one halfpenny a pound, and by manipulation of the transport levy, mentioned above, fishermen were given higher firsthand prices in winter than in summer. (It was desired to avoid seasonal changes in the retail price on account of the cost-of-living index.) It had originally been intended to make the change in April, but on the pretext that a wages claim might be prejudiced thereby, both trawler owners and their men had prevailed on the Ministry to postpone the operation of the new prices Order; even so there were short strikes against the price of hake, the main fish landed at Milford Haven and Fleetwood. In September, therefore, a special price concession, amounting to 7d. a stone (14 pounds), admittedly purely for the sake of industrial peace, was made for this fish. When the time to fix prices for the summer of 1944 came round, trawler owners again claimed that hake prices should be increased, and a further 7d. a stone was conceded, this time on the grounds that the Milford Haven fleet might have to be transferred to Fleetwood as part of the plans for the invasion of Europe, and that yields from the hake fishing would therefore fall.

The results of the first year's trading, under the revised prices of June 1943, turned out to be even more favorable to the trawler owners than the Ministry had estimated when fixing the prices. The average net profit per stone of fish landed was more than 1s. 3d.—

twice the estimate and more than half the prewar average firsthand price. The depleted fishing fleet was reckoned to be earning 37 per cent on its capital. The figures pointed to a reduction in price of a further 1d. a pound; it was deemed inadvisable to enforce this for the winter season, but the trade was warned that it would come the following March. However, largely for political reasons, as it seems—the end of the war was in sight and with it a General Election—a general price cut was again postponed. Not till 1945/46, in a political climate more favorable to drastic price controls, were a succession of cuts put into force, which even so left the earnings of all sections of the industry at a more than generous level.

CITATIONS

- 1 Quoted in his "official" biography, *D. A. Thomas Viscount Rhondda*, by his daughter (2d Viscountess Rhondda) and others (London, 1921).
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- 3 W. S. Churchill, *The Second World War: III, The Grand Alliance* (Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston, 1950).
- 4 S.R.&O. 1941, No. 924.
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CHAPTER 5

THE PEAK EFFORT IN HOME PRODUCTION,
1942-45

TILLAGE INCREASES

The first two harvests of the war can be said to have been *planned*, only in a very general sense: farmers had been given guidance on cropping policy, but a great deal had been left to their own discretion, and recourse to price manipulation as a means of making one crop more attractive to them than another had been almost entirely eschewed. (Seasonal price variation had been and was to be used to influence the rate of marketing of particular crops and livestock.) The governing factor in those years had been, not a program of requirements laid down by the Ministry of Food, but the shortage of feedstuffs, that forced upon both Government and farmers measures that they might have preferred not to take. The first two years of the plowing-up campaign, though tactically and literally breaking new ground, were imbued with a defensive strategy; the production of extra supplies of direct human food took second place to the maintenance of as many livestock as was practicable under war conditions. The pigs and sheep that were sacrificed may be likened to the inevitable casualties of a retreat to stronger positions.

However, when, in the summer of 1941, the Ministry of Food and the Agricultural Departments began to make plans for the harvest of 1942, both the objectives of policy and the means by which they should be attained could be more clearly seen, and more readily agreed upon, than at any earlier time. The German attack on Russia had given the British Isles breathing space; the threat of invasion had at least receded; Lend-Lease and Canadian help had removed anxieties about overseas supply and made it certain that shipping resources could be used to the best advantage. The task before British agriculture, therefore, was to provide the largest possible amounts of those foods that could partly or wholly replace imports—wheat, potatoes, and sugar beet—or those that could not be imported at all—fresh vegetables and milk. Since any further reductions in livestock other than pigs and poultry were not desired,

an increased production of crops could only be got from a further enlargement of the tillage area. This process would soon reach its limits; the plowing-up campaign was in course of using up reserves of fertility in the soil stored up during the years it had been under grass. Some land would soon have to be put under temporary leys if its fertility were not to be seriously impaired.

There arose, therefore, a point of timing. If the peak effort could not be sustained over more than two or three seasons, when could it most usefully be made? Was the maximum saving in imports wanted in 1942 and 1943, or later in what was now obviously going to be a long war? In the summer of 1941 this question was difficult to answer; however, it was decided to go for the earlier dates. The object set for the third plowing-up campaign was 1¼ million acres, or not much more than half that of the previous year; and although 1½ million were actually plowed up, the reversion of some 300,000 acres to temporary grass, together with encroachments on the agricultural land for airfields and other military purposes, meant that the *net* increase in the tillage area was rather less than a million acres.

In 1942/43, the fourth year of war, an even greater effort was asked for—the plowing up of a further 1½ million acres, a figure at first thought to be beyond the industry's capacity, and only decided on as late as October 1942, when import prospects were at their gravest. Although this aim was more than achieved, the net increase in arable land was again rather less—some 800,000 acres—and this proved to be the virtual limit of the plowing-up campaign. In 1943/44, though some 500,000 acres were again brought under the plow for the first time, an almost equal area was put back to temporary grass.

In contrast with the earlier campaign, those of the later years, for all that they resulted in a smaller increase in the tillage area, greatly increased the direct output of human food from British soil. The acreage under wheat in 1943, at nearly 3½ million, was double what it had been in 1939, and 40 percent more than in 1942; that under potatoes had been similarly doubled compared with prewar. In addition, there had been sizable increases in the acreage of sugar beet, the production of which was limited by the capacity of the beet sugar factories, and of barley, a surplus of which from the 1942 harvest made a useful diluent for bread during most of 1943. The acreage of oats, by contrast, reached its peak in 1942; in later years oats lost ground to wheat and barley, the former the bread grain

par excellence, the latter encouraged by the Government as a potential ingredient for flour, but in fact never used for that purpose after 1943 (what was not used for beer was allocated, as the shipping situation showed signs of improvement, to livestock feeding). There were also, during these years, considerable increases in *horticultural crops* such as tomatoes, cabbage and other brassicas, onions, chicory (for use in coffee "extract"), and, above all, carrots, besides the important nonfood crop of flax, hardly at all grown in the United Kingdom before the war.

Thanks partly to favorable weather during all the war years, these enormous increases in acreage were not, as one might have expected, accompanied by falls in yield. On the contrary, yields of the principal crops—wheat, barley, oats, potatoes, and sugar beet—exceeded the average almost without exception. In the critical year 1943 the wheat and barley yields were 13 percent above normal, the equivalent, it was estimated, of 500,000 tons of wheat imports. (Not until 1946 could the run of good harvests really be said to cease; and it was in that year that the United Kingdom was driven to ration bread and flour.) Looked at in retrospect, the war effort of British agriculture, reflected in output no less than in acreage figures, takes on the aspect of a triumphal procession, with the hint of impeccable organization that such a procession always conveys.

FERTILIZERS AND FARM MACHINERY

Careful organization there certainly was. In the first place, the planned production of the later years, arranged in accordance with programs worked out by the Ministry of Food (for flax, the Ministry of Supply) and the Agricultural Departments in collaboration, could not have got beyond the drawing-board stage if the Government, through the County and District War Agricultural Executive Committees, had not acquired both the knowledge of each individual farm and the confidence of the farming community that were essential to putting it into practice. These things could not be got in a hurry, and that fact alone would have precluded production increases of such magnitude at an earlier stage in the war. In the second place, farmers had to be provided not merely with the working capital to increase production (this was done largely by the rough-and-ready, but as it seems effective, means of generous price increases early in the war) but also with the factors of production themselves—labor, machinery, and fertilizers. All these, in a world at war, were likely to become increasingly scarce; only the Govern-

ment could see that they were provided in sufficient amounts, and in the prewar stage it had already accepted responsibility for all three.

The measures for assisting agriculture embodied in the Agriculture Act of 1937 (1) had included subsidies on lime and basic slag, to encourage farmers to improve their grassland. Fertilizers had also been included in the list of essential commodities to be acquired by the Government under the storage schemes authorized in the Essential Commodities (Reserves) Act of 1938; and in the spring of 1939 purchase of the imported fertilizers, particularly potash and phosphate rock, expected to be scarce in wartime, was begun. Nitrogenous fertilizers, mainly sulphate of ammonia, were home-produced and not expected to be scarce, at any rate at the outbreak of war. It was arranged that fertilizers should be controlled by the Ministry of Supply, which would, however, be guided by the Agricultural Departments on matters of supply and distribution affecting the food production campaign.

On the whole, the expectations of the prewar planners were fulfilled. Supplies of nitrogenous fertilizers exceeded demand until 1942, after which supplies fell somewhat short of requirements because of shortages of labor and transport; in the summer of 1943, an Order prohibited (except under license) the use of these fertilizers during the months of September to December, when winter rains are likely to wash them away. For potash and phosphates more drastic measures were necessary. The collapse of France reduced supplies of the former to two-thirds of normal; in the autumn of 1940 the first of a series of Orders (2, No. 1585; 3, No. 1207; 4, No. 824) was issued restricting sales of potassic fertilizers to farmers growing potatoes, market-garden crops, sugar beet, and flax, or whose soil was certified by the W.A.E.C. to be seriously deficient in potash; later Orders even specified the amount of potash per acre that might be applied to these priority crops.

The supply of phosphates was even more difficult. Basic slag output had doubled by 1942, with the increase in steel production at home; but basic slag is not generally applied to arable land. Supplies of phosphate rock from the western Mediterranean were cut off in 1940, to be resumed when French North Africa was recovered at the end of 1942; meanwhile supplies from Nauru in the Pacific had first been reduced, when a German warship successfully raided the island, and then cut off when the Japanese captured it. In December 1941 the use of phosphates on pasture was prohibited; two County War Agricultural Committees (Norfolk and East Sus-

sex) experimentally rationed phosphates during that winter.¹ The following autumn the Norfolk system, which had been a pronounced success, was extended to the whole of England and Wales, and definitely linked with the cropping plans for the 1943 harvest. Farmers might henceforth obtain both phosphatic and potassic fertilizers only upon production of a certificate from the County Committees. Allocations to counties were based on standard dressings per acre of arable crops, with special allowances for soils known to be deficient in one or the other ingredient. In the following year, 1943/44, supplies of all types of fertilizers improved and the restrictions on their use could be relaxed; in particular, it was possible to allow greater supplies of potash, of which the deficiency was demonstrably acute in some districts.

The 1937 Act had also provided for a subsidy on *lime*, as a result of which its use by farmers had very much increased in the last two years of peace. One of the unforeseen results of the war was a slight shortage of lime for agriculture, due to increased industrial demands and scarcity of labor in the lime works. In 1941 the Government extended to lime producers the financial assistance given to other industries whose output it was desired to increase in wartime; at the same time it extended the subsidy on lime to farmers, originally due to expire in 1942, for a further three years (after which it was again renewed). These measures bore fruit during 1942-44; stimulated by a propaganda campaign, deliveries of lime for agriculture rose to more than double the rate of previous years, and may have been as much as ten times the pre-1937 level. Deliveries on such a scale raised great transport difficulties, and it was thought necessary to introduce zoning schemes and delivery quotas for various counties or groups of counties in order that long- and cross-haulage should be avoided, and, on the other hand, farms remote from the producing centers sufficiently supplied. County Committees used their compulsory powers where necessary to ensure that lime was actually applied to the land.

The Government had also been active in the last months of peace about *farm machinery*. As early as September 1937 the Agricultural Departments had taken a partial census of tractors, from which it appeared that though there would be ample in the arable districts of Great Britain to get the plowing-up campaign in motion, the grass-land districts of the north and west of England and Wales would be some 4,500 short. At the time of the Munich crisis the Ministry of

¹ Given statutory authority by a Ministry of Agriculture Order (5, No. 1738).

Agriculture was actually proposing to requisition tractors and their implements in the east of England for use elsewhere, as being the only means by which the autumn plowing could have been accomplished. But this would have been both difficult and unpopular; and when Sir Reginald Dorman-Smith, the then chairman of the National Farmers' Union of England and Wales, became Minister of Agriculture in March 1939, he at once proposed that the Government should purchase a stock of tractors and implements sufficient to meet the deficiency. A contract was thereupon entered into with the Ford Motor Company of England, whose tractor production was at that time running at only about 40 percent of capacity; about half the number contracted for had been delivered at the outbreak of war, and the remainder were supplied by the end of 1939. Arrangements were also made to accumulate reserves of implements, but the war supervened before they could become effective.

The importance of the contract with Ford's goes beyond the value of the tractors themselves at the opening of the food production campaign. It meant that the company was operating at a high level of output when war broke out, and therefore was better equipped to meet the flood of private orders that ensued. In 1938 it had sold about 4,000 tractors in the United Kingdom; in 1940 it sold 17,000 and in 1941, 19,000; even so, it had nearly a year's backlog of orders to fill. Something like one-tenth of its production appears to have been taken by the Government, for use under the auspices of the War Agricultural Executive Committees; the remainder was bought by farmers themselves, stimulated by a plenty of cash and a growing shortage of labor (6). There was a comparable demand for other types of machinery, both imported and home-produced; and as the war proceeded the Government came to exercise complete control over its supply and distribution.

Until the end of 1940, imports of agricultural machinery were undertaken by private firms under Board of Trade license, the issue of which was regulated, from July 1940 onward, in accordance with shipping as well as foreign exchange needs. From January 1941 the Government itself became the sole importer of the more important types of machinery, and eventually of all. At first, despite the long journey, as much machinery as possible was taken from Australia; Lend-Lease and Canadian aid, however, enabled it to be drawn from North America, though the outbreak of war in the Pacific limited supplies and caused farm machinery, like fertilizers, to be made subject to allocation through the Combined Boards. Nevertheless, in

every war year, imports—mainly tractors, tractor-plows, disc harrows, and binders—were several times the prewar average. The import of combine-harvesters in 1944 was nearly a thousand—as many as in thirty prewar years.

The control over home-produced machinery developed similarly. From April 1940 the Ministry of Agriculture took over from the Iron and Steel Control of the Ministry of Supply the allocation of steel to manufacturers. Beginning with the large firms, this control was tightened up by degrees until by 1942 country blacksmiths were dependent on the Ministry for their few hundredweights of steel a quarter. So also with alloy steels, drop forgings, ball bearings, and timber. In 1941 it was decided to ration the demand for machinery to ensure that farmers, particularly in those parts of the country that had not been used to buying much machinery before the war, got supplies according to need and not merely on account of existing trade connections. From October 1941, the purchase of imported machinery was only allowed after investigation by County Committees; the same system was applied to home-produced tractors in February 1942, and to tractor-plows and threshing machines in March 1943. As a result of these restrictions, the price of second-hand machinery rose so sharply that it was subjected to price control, which fixed as a ceiling either the original price when new or the price of a new model of the same type.

In the years of peak production, more machinery was in use on British farms than ever in their history; yet there was still a shortage of machines, of spare parts, of labor for repairs, to say nothing of accessories like binder twine and sacks, both of which became acutely scarce as a result of the Japanese advance in Southeast Asia. From 1942 onward the Government strove to mitigate these difficulties by getting farmers to make the best use of the machinery at their disposal. W.A.E.C.'s gave technical advice to farmers on upkeep, adjustment, and minor repairs; courses were organized to train local blacksmiths in repair methods for modern machinery, with which many of them were unfamiliar. Groups of farmers, sometimes with the support of County and District Committees, organized pools for sharing machinery among their members, or doing work on one another's behalf. The Committees themselves had already become operators of machinery on a large scale, either directly or through contractors. Sometimes they hired out machinery to farmers; more often perhaps they or their contractors undertook specific tasks, particularly grain threshing, for which only the large farmer would

normally have his own equipment. There were thousands of small farms that could never have been mobilized for the food production campaign, had it not been for the machinery, and particularly the tractors, made available by the deliberate action of the State.

Nevertheless, it is in the increase of machinery owned by farmers themselves that the real wartime revolution in British farming must be sought. The first complete census of farm machinery was not taken till May 1942, when already the number of tractors in use was double the figure estimated in the partial census of 1937. By April 1944 it had risen to treble that number. War had brought about a change that might otherwise have taken generations to complete—if indeed it would ever have taken place at all.

FARM LABOR

Without mechanization and retooling on such a scale and at such a speed, the achievements of the food production campaign would have been out of the question, for there was never any possibility of a commensurate increase in the agricultural labor force. In the stage of prewar planning, when only a very moderate increase in home production was being thought of, the responsible Departments had foreseen a labor shortage and striven to guard against it: first, by securing a high degree of protection to agricultural workers against being drafted into the armed forces; and second, by arranging for the recruitment and training of a volunteer force of women land workers (the *Women's Land Army*), as had been done in the war of 1914. When, in the spring of 1940, the Government decided to enlarge the scale of the agricultural war effort, it took especial measures to keep workers on the land; and it even overrode the normal wage-fixing arrangements in order to establish a national minimum wage for the whole Kingdom (2, No. 877). At that time Departments believed that in the calendar year 1940 alone, between 60 and 70 thousand extra hired workers would be required for agriculture, about one-tenth of the June 1939 labor force; recruitment would (it was thought) have to be considerably higher than this, in order to replace workers who had voluntarily gone into the Army or into other, more highly paid war work.

It is not easy to see where these workers could have come from, had they been required; but in fact the calculation proved to be ill-founded. Within weeks of the introduction of the Order restricting engagements of former agricultural employees, the Ministry of Labour employment exchanges were finding it impossible to place

on farms all the agricultural workers registered with them; skilled men were indeed in great demand, but there was little or no call from farmers either for unskilled labor or for the "land girls" being trained in the Women's Land Army. It was not until the spring of 1941 that the prewar labor force, diminished to some small extent by call-up and wastage, and reinforced by rather more than prewar numbers of casual and seasonal workers, began to show signs of inadequacy for the work it had to do.

By that time two things were clear. In the first place, any large-scale recruitment of *men* for agriculture was out of the question; they could not be spared even had they been willing to come. The Women's Land Army was in fact to be the only important source of extra labor for agriculture, apart from unskilled and mainly casual labor imported from Eire and prisoners of war. In the second place, a great deal of this fresh labor could not be used in the way that had been originally intended, namely, as employees of individual farmers; land girls increasingly, prisoners of war predominantly, came to be employed by County Committees in gangs, both on contract work for farmers and on land reclamation and drainage projects. One reason for this was, of course, that this type of work was entirely new and so had no nucleus of existing labor on which to build; farmers, on the other hand, preferred to use the men they had (and themselves and their families) to the utmost before asking for a land girl. The problem of housing Land Army volunteers in a countryside not well provided with houses before the war, and now filled with refugees from the towns, billeted soldiers, and the like, was difficult from the very beginning, when there were only a few thousand girls to be placed; nor was it solved when the individual had been found an "approved billet," or board with the farmer employing her. The Land Army, like its military counterparts, had to develop welfare services on a considerable scale. Even so, girls tended to prefer employment by County Committees, with its shorter hours and generally more urban comforts and amenities.

From 1941 onward the Government found itself obliged to set up hostels for agricultural workers on a large scale, either in requisitioned buildings or in hutments especially erected for the purpose. Over two years, that is to say by March 1943, nearly 1,000 of these hostels had been set up, providing beds for 28,000 workers. After that date the rate of expansion was slowed down, partly through sheer want of resources, partly because it was decided in July 1943 to put a ceiling on recruitment for the Land Army, now 80,000

strong, in the interests of other work of national importance for which "mobile" women were needed. The only sizable addition to the agricultural labor force thereafter was in prisoners of war, of whom there were 25,000 in June 1944 and 58,000 in June 1945, and who continued to be indispensable for some time thereafter.

The broad conclusions to be drawn from the statistical returns of hired workers employed in agriculture during the war years are as follows. The number of men and boys remained virtually stationary at just over half a million, losses to the Services and other employments being balanced, as of June 1944, by new recruits (including conscientious objectors to military service, directed to land work by tribunals under the National Service Acts) and prisoners of war. The number of women and girls, about 55,000 in June 1939, had risen to 143,000, its peak figure, in June 1944. The total regular labor force in the industry had risen by not much more than ten per cent—less than this, if allowance be made for the 300,000 or so working farmers and their wives. Such a labor force, even assisted by mechanical aids on an unprecedented scale, could not have coped with the seasonal rush of work, particularly at harvest time. Even before the war, farmers had been accustomed to recruit a sizable proportion of casual labor; wartime cropping programs accentuated the seasonal peaks in the demand for labor and made it necessary to take special steps to recruit it. In particular, school children above the age of 12, and townspeople on holiday, were encouraged to join "harvest camps"; in rural districts children were employed on a large scale for potato planting and lifting, and the holidays of state-controlled schools were manipulated so that they might be free for this purpose. (It was illegal to employ children under 12; but in one year at least, 1944, infringements of the law were winked at, in order to get the potato harvest in.) No figures are available to show the extent to which the labor force at peak times was augmented by these various means, but their contribution must have been very considerable.

POTATOES

The observer is left, therefore, with a sense of great, but precarious, achievement when he contemplates the harvests of the later years of war. Their dependence on the weather, on sufficient casual labor being forthcoming, on the course of the war itself—for Italian and German prisoners of war were a decisive marginal source of labor—makes the planning of the Departments, and of farmers, par-

take of the nature of a hazardous though successful gamble. Those who urge upon the United Kingdom the greatest possible degree of self-sufficiency in food production, as an insurance against war risks, are apt to overlook the increased uncertainty that comes from reliance on home agriculture alone. It is a historical fact that even at the worst period of the war, imported supplies could be more reliably forecast than those from home production. It is also true that the problems of control and marketing facing the Ministry of Food were at their greatest for those commodities that could not be imported at all.

Of these problem foods the potato takes pride of place on all counts. It was the enormously increased acreage of potatoes, from 1941 onward, that strained the labor resources of agriculture to their limits; it was the repeated planting of potatoes on the same land that brought about a serious problem of eelworm infestation in the later years of war; it was the potato that set the Ministry of Food perpetually oscillating between the Scylla of shortage and the Charybdis of glut.

Why did the Government, and more especially the Ministry of Food, seek to promote an increase of the potato acreage until it was almost double what it had been before the war? Sir William Beveridge, writing of the earlier period of food control (7, pp. 153-54), supplied part of the answer: ". . . it yields a much higher food value per acre than any cereal, and is therefore attractive to administrators who have just learned about calories." Had he been writing twenty years later he might have added "and vitamin C," which at times loomed at least as large as calories in the minds of those advocating greater and even greater potato acreages. He went on to point out that the advantage of potatoes over cereals "is diminished by the greater cost of production and the labour involved. Still more it is affected by the highly speculative nature of the crop," and he explained, with wit, brevity, and force, the troubles into which this "puckish vegetable" led British Food Controllers.

Since Beveridge's work was one of the textbooks of the prewar planners, it is at first sight surprising that the Government should not have been more wary in its approach to the potato problem. Yet even before the fall of France it had encouraged an increase in the acreage that—unless yields were acutely subnormal or consumption should rise sharply—must result in a heavy surplus. Moreover, when the decision to do this, along with an undertaking to relieve the grower of loss, was announced in December 1939 in the House of

Commons (3), there was already in prospect a sizable surplus from the 1939 crop.

The motive forces behind a "forward" potato policy appear to have been various. There was a desire to insure against a shortage, such as had occurred in the spring of 1917, the potato queues of which were still remembered. There was the very existence of an organized interest in potato growing, in the form of the producer-controlled Potato Marketing Board that had been set up under the Agricultural Marketing Act of 1933, and that, while restricting potato acreage and regulating marketing so as to keep prices stable, had also carried on propaganda to get more potatoes eaten. It was the staff of this Board that now formed the Ministry of Food's Potato Division and had largely drawn up the plans for potato control; moreover, the levy the Board collected from growers lay to hand as a possible means of financing the purchase of surplus potatoes without cost to the Exchequer. (This levy was later discontinued as inconsistent with the promotion of potato consumption.) There was the legacy of the original estimates about wartime food production, drawn up in 1936/37 on the basis of the supposed 25 percent cut in food imports in the first year of war; these had envisaged an increase in potato acreage of one-third or more. There was the widespread belief, to which Beveridge had himself given some support, that surplus potatoes could be readily used in the loaf and would therefore provide a means of direct and certain economy in wheat supplies. (He said, following the Royal Commission for Wheat Supplies that was responsible for wheat control in World War I, that but for the Armistice of 1918 the loaf would have contained a substantial element of potatoes; but this assertion was mistaken.) Reinforcing these, but mainly influential in the years after 1940, was scientific enthusiasm for the potato as a valuable source of vitamin C, particularly when supplies of imported fruit were cut off for lack of ships. Arguments that might have cut the other way, such as the burden on transport facilities that increased supplies of ware and seed would mean, and the labor that would be required to harvest them, went by default. As has been noted in discussing the plans for rationing, the prospect of other wartime shortages than that of food was largely neglected.

In short, so far from considering what the *optimum* acreage of potatoes should be, the Ministry of Food, with the support of the Cabinet's Scientific Food Committee, went out for the *maximum*. The increase of 130,000 acres achieved in 1940 compared with the

previous year's figure of some 700,000, was regarded as disappointing, and in part due to the vague terms in which crop insurance had been promised to growers. For 1941, it was decided to resort to compulsory directions to plant, issued (though not without discussion with the grower) by C.W.A.E.C.'s, and carrying with them an inevitable guaranty to purchase any sound potatoes for which he could not find a market. Under this stimulus and an increased grower's price, the acreage sown in 1941 rose to $1\frac{1}{10}$ million, more than 50 percent above the prewar average.

These measures were to involve the Ministry of Food in elaborate arrangements for surplus disposal, complicated by the fact that the size of the surplus was, until the very end of every season, an unknown quantity. The trend of retail sales could not readily be foreseen, depending as it did on the supplies of other foods—both for human consumption and for domestic animals such as dogs, pigs, and hens—and the quality of the potatoes themselves. Waste of potatoes in clamp, during the winter and spring, was equally uncertain, according to the state of the crop, the skill of the farmer in clamping, and above all the weather, particularly late in the season. The Ministry had to be ready to change its disposal policy at short notice, in accordance with statistical returns that could never provide a certain guide until after the event. These difficulties would have been inescapable, even had acreage been limited to the amount necessary to ensure that there were enough potatoes to meet unrestricted demand. They were much enhanced by the decision—partly on nutritional grounds, partly in a desire to economize in imported wheat, partly to avoid criticisms of waste—positively to encourage potato consumption.

The 1940 crop was itself so good as to indicate a surplus of the order of 500,000 tons, and in December the Ministry of Food began to buy potatoes for resale, at a lower price, for feeding livestock. By an orderly process of disposal, month by month, it hoped to avoid the confusion and waste that must have ensued had action been postponed till later in the season. But there were many, particularly among the scientists advising the Government, who looked askance at this expensive way of getting rid of what they regarded as an insurance against starvation.² They urged that it would be better to subsidize potatoes for human consumption, and boost them by an advertising campaign. The latter was embarked upon in March

² According to Salaman (9, p. 578), the "policy of the Government was to regard potatoes as the main reserve for calories . . ."

1941; objections to the subsidy were overcome by the discovery that it would in any case be necessary in order to stabilize the cost-of-living index.

However, the weather of 1941—a dry cold spring followed by heat and drought—was such as to produce a slight end-of-season shortage, thanks to the lateness of the new crop. The Ministry of Food had earmarked by purchase on farms an end-of-season reserve of some 250,000 tons, but some of these would not keep in the hot weather and had also to be sold for stockfeed. Potato queues in some districts caused the Ministry to be criticized, quite mistakenly, for its earlier surplus disposals, and seemed to strengthen the case for the increase in acreage that had already been accomplished. But the increase in acreage that had already been accomplished. But it also emphasized the need—or so it was thought—to build up a much larger end-of-season reserve for the spring of 1942.

The paradox of potato policy thus stood out more sharply than before; there must be at once a greater stimulus to consumption, in order to avoid waste, and at the same time more and yet more careful planning against a shortage that, should it occur, would be made worse by the fact of the consumption increase. It was indeed no more than a mathematical platitude that the actual size of a surplus or deficit must grow in proportion to the average supplies it was desired to secure. But the position was in fact more formidable than that, for each increase in acreage brought in growers inexperienced or on unsuitable soil, and even when the gross yield from these was not far below average, the net yield of potatoes fit for retail sale was less. With each increase in the crop, the proportion that went for human consumption declined, even though the absolute amount sold for this purpose might rise.

The crop of 1941, though heavy, suffered so much from blight that a fresh publicity campaign was not undertaken; there would in fact have been no surplus that year for human consumption, had not the next crop (1942) been perversely early and produced a glut of new potatoes. (The acreage had been increased yet again, to over 1.3 million, in face of the worsening shipping situation early in 1942.) Heavy but quite misconceived criticism of the high proportion of the previous crop that had been fed to animals or otherwise "wasted" lent force to the major advertising campaign that was now launched with its main slogan "Eat Potatoes Instead of Bread." This campaign had to be damped down toward the end of the winter because, whether on account of it or for other reasons, the "disappearance" of potatoes the previous autumn had risen sharply, and

the Ministry had been constrained to increase the supply by reducing the size of the ware riddle. (Potatoes are "dressed" for marketing by means of a riddle that allows dirt and undersized potatoes to fall through. The Potato Marketing Board had adjusted the supplies coming onto the market by prescribing various sizes of riddle from time to time; this practice was taken over by the wartime control.) But again the new crop was early, and even more end-of-season potatoes had to be sold for stockfeed than in the previous season.

However, the cropping program for 1943 had been fixed at a time when the Ministry of Food seemed to have conjured up the specter of future potato rationing; and yet another 100,000 acres were added to the previous year's area, despite the misgivings of the Agricultural Departments. The crop was correspondingly larger, but consumption during the autumn ran higher still, and once again there were fears of a spring shortage that led to a reduction of riddle size to the almost derisory figure of $1\frac{1}{4}$ inches. Rationing was in the end avoided, but the Ministry of Food began the new crop year, 1944/45, with much apprehension. Shortage of labor, and particularly the ceiling that had been put on recruiting to the Women's Land Army, had at last put a stop to the expansion of potato acreage; it was indeed only after much persuasion that the Agricultural Departments had agreed to maintain that of the previous year. Harvesting and clamping conditions were unfavorable; the yield was down (6.4 tons per acre as against 7.1 the previous year); and though these conditions in themselves operated to reduce consumption early in the season, rationing seemed almost inevitable, and was prepared for, during the first months of 1945. In the event, however, no more than a rough-and-ready allocation scheme, operated by agreement with the trade, was put into force, and no more than mild local shortages were experienced. (Indeed, for a few weeks in March and April, the Ministry wondered if it had not gone too far in reducing consumption, and hastily removed restrictions it had imposed on the free movement of potatoes from one part of the country to another.)

Neither the planting of an acreage almost twice that of the pre-war period, nor the laborious accumulation of an end-of-season reserve amounting, in 1943 and 1944, to as much as 700,000 tons, had sufficed to lay the bogy of shortage. Although rationing was in fact avoided until the disastrous year of 1947/48 (when a rudimentary form of it was imposed and did no harm), the Ministry continued to labor fearfully year by year until the restoration of

supplies from the Channel Islands closed the end-of-season gap. Except that a shortage of potatoes in the shops would have caused great public annoyance, this gap was unimportant, for the contribution of vitamin C that comes from old potatoes in the months from March onward is quite negligible. Indeed, from the nutritional point of view potatoes are best eaten in the early months of the season; and the policy of withdrawing the good keepers for the end-of-season reserve meant, in effect, debasing the quality of potatoes on the market throughout the year.

The fact that, in order to secure a given supply of sound potatoes, consumers had to buy more potatoes than they would have done before the war, may well account for a considerable proportion of the apparent rise in sales for human consumption during the war years. Another element in this rise, which while it cannot be measured cannot be ignored, is the use of potatoes for feeding the greatly increased numbers of "backyard" pigs and poultry. That potatoes should be heavily subsidized to the benefit of privileged consumers of home-fed eggs and bacon was clearly an abuse, unavoidable so long as the Government regarded potatoes as a substitute for imported wheat, and therefore a "ship-saving" crop. It is questionable whether the extra supplies of potatoes grown in the later years of the war were anything of the sort. That there was no substantial fall in flour consumption during these years of abundant potatoes is an indication, though not decisive evidence, of what may have been happening—widespread household waste, promoted by the cheapness of potatoes, their often indifferent quality, and Government encouragement and assurance of their plenty and food value.

Except in the scientific sense, potatoes are not a substitute for bread at all, though bread has to do duty for potatoes if they are scarce. On the other hand, they are, within limits, the obvious way of making scarce supplies of meat and bacon go further at a main meal. It is not surprising, therefore, that potato consumption should have begun to rise sharply in 1941, when the meat ration fell even more abruptly; and it was only right, particularly at that time, that the Government should do its best to insure against a shortage of potatoes. But the deliberate fostering of potato consumption after that date is much more questionable. It carried with it extra anxiety and expense; because of the uncertainty of the crop it did not enable a planned reduction of wheat imports. Because of the competition of sugar beet in the traditional potato-growing areas, and the increasing incidence of eelworm there, the extra acreage had to be

found in counties with naturally less fertile soil, often on newly plowed pasture deficient in phosphates, farmed by those to whom potatoes were an unfamiliar crop. This was reflected in yields 2 to 3 tons per acre lower than those in the fenland districts.

When the generally lower quality and higher wastage of these marginal potatoes are taken into account, one cannot but feel that the extra 200 to 250 thousand acres devoted to them in each year after 1942 might have been put to better use. The substitution of bread grains would not, in all probability, have shown a significant paper loss in calories; the demands on labor would have been less, and the element of uncertainty, particularly after harvesting, must have been greatly reduced.

The case of potato policy has been discussed at some length partly because only by a year to year account of its vicissitudes can it be made intelligible, partly because it illustrates the nature and limitations of a planned food economy more clearly than any other major article of consumption. "With the potato," remarked Sir William Beveridge, "we are back in the period before international trade; its price rises and falls precipitously, as did that of wheat in the Middle Ages" (7, p. 153). He could not be expected to foresee a time when, in the names of price stabilization and nutrition, the Government would all but cast aside its principal weapon—price change—as a means of discouraging waste and adjusting supply to demand in time of unavoidable scarcity. The Ministry of Food's publicity referred, in one of its more sanguine moments, to "The Potato Plan"; in truth potatoes defied all planning, consistently impelling the Ministry to expensive, if successful, improvisation, simply because they were all home grown. They exemplify by contrast the strength British food policy was to draw from its very dependence on overseas supplies.

LIVESTOCK

In contrast with the earlier years of war, these years of peak effort in crop production were not marked by drastic changes in the numbers of farm livestock. Pig numbers, already down to 2.1 million (or half the prewar figure) in mid-1942, fell to a low point of 1.8 million a year later; thereafter they began a slow rise, when more barley was released for feeding. Poultry numbers followed a similar course, though their lowest point, also in 1943, was about two-thirds prewar. Sheep numbers, reduced on account of the shortage of grazing, remained more or less stationary; those of cattle rose

slowly and in June 1945 were returned as 9.6 million, or about 7 percent above the prewar level.

The amounts of meat, milk, and eggs available for the ordinary customer as a result of these changes depended also, of course, on the effect of changes in the types and quantities of feedstuffs for animals as well as on the ability of the Government to attract these products to controlled channels. So far as meat was concerned, the control of marketing and slaughter was complete enough to render illicit transactions numerically unimportant; the fall in output to about 70 percent or less of the estimated prewar quantity is mainly a function of the fall in livestock numbers, though a subsidiary influence in the case of beef may have been the absence of both feed and price-inducement to carry prime animals on to weights at which they would yield the highest proportion of meat to bone. The output of home-produced bacon at its lowest (some two-thirds of the prewar quantity) had fallen less than the number of pigs, because hardly any pigs were now used for fresh pork. The converse is true of eggs; it was estimated that as much as one-half of the total production escaped control, either through exemptions or simple evasion. This estimate includes the production of domestic fowls and others not included in the Agricultural Returns, and cannot therefore be directly compared with the change in the numbers of farm poultry, noted above; nor are accurate estimates possible either of home-produced egg supplies before the war or of the fall in egg yields as a result of inferior supplies of feedstuffs. But it seems likely that the number of home-produced eggs marketed through normal channels, i.e., those now controlled by the Ministry of Food, was considerably less than half the prewar figure.

Milk production was more complicated, and more effectively influenced by Government action. The fall in yields that occurred during the first two years of war was a source of anxiety both to experts in nutrition and to administrators. The adoption of the National Milk Scheme for mothers and children (chapter 8), together with the shortage of other foods—especially condensed skimmed milk from the Continent (10), much used by the poor before the war—and the general increase in money incomes, led to a steady increase in the demand for milk from the summer of 1940 onward. The Ministry of Food was forced to restrict the amount of milk that might be sold to the ordinary "nonpriority" consumer, notwithstanding that the amount of milk used for manufacture into butter, cheese, and other milk products was also restricted. From 1941/42 onward

supplies for adults fell, for several months each winter, to an average of little more than two pints per head per week (imperial pints of 20 ounces, equal to $1\frac{1}{4}$ American pints). So long as priority demands continued to increase, even this meager supply would be in continual peril; an increase in milk sales, and particularly winter milk sales, from farms was therefore urgent.

Some steps had been taken in this direction during the first years of war, by bringing into the Milk Marketing Schemes cow keepers who had not sold liquid milk before the war, beef breeders who used milk for calf rearing, and makers of farmhouse butter and cheese. As in World War I, the production of the latter, and also of veal calves, was deliberately made unprofitable by controlling prices at a low level; on the other hand, generous prices and guaranteed market for liquid milk encouraged its sale and the use of substitutes for calf rearing. (From 1943 onward the Ministry of Food marketed a *National Calf Starter*, based on dried whey and dried skim milk; the saving of milk for the year 1944 through the use of this and proprietary calf foods, made under Ministry license, was estimated at 50 million gallons.) In each year of the war up to 1943, the number of producers registered with the Milk Marketing Board for England and Wales increased; in the latter year, it was nearly 15 percent above the September 1939 figure. Since newcomers were naturally those with small herds, not specialized for supplying milk to the liquid market, they could not be expected to make a proportionate contribution to supplies. Nevertheless, but for their advent to the marketing scheme, the position in the winter of 1941/42 would have been almost desperate.

For the fall in milk yields various causes were adduced, apart from the shortage of concentrated feedstuffs. The unusually severe winters of both 1939/40 and 1940/41 had been followed by abnormally dry springs. Dairy farmers were notoriously apt to keep more hens than a calculation of feedstuff supplies would justify, and it was inferred that some of the eggs not sold to the control were produced from the dairy cows' rations. Moreover, time was needed for farmers to get the best results from new ways of feeding, based on bulky home-grown foods whose supply varied from month to month. On the whole, indeed, it is a matter for wonder that milk yields did not fall further than they did; and a matter for reflection, that they would have fallen further, had the country's dairy herds consisted mainly of the finest type of high-yielding cow, needing a highly concentrated and protein-rich diet, instead of a larger number

of more nondescript animals that could produce three or four hundred gallons a year on an austerity diet. (It was because the experts tended to argue in terms of the ideal cow, that they forecast a catastrophe that did not occur.)

For the remainder of the war there was no prospect of greater supplies of concentrates; indeed, the raising of the flour extraction rate in the spring of 1942 meant a further reduction in supplies, though this was cushioned for the time being by the release of the Ministry of Food's "milk production reserve" of maize, imported during a temporary easement of the shipping situation in the summer of 1941. In order to get more milk, the Government therefore had to rely on measures of education and propaganda to make sure that farmers both realized the need for milk and made the best use of their resources. Here, as in the campaign for more crops, the local knowledge acquired by the War Agricultural Executive Committees proved invaluable. Their powers over the number and type of livestock on farms, originally granted in pursuit of the abortive livestock reduction campaign, were revised and strengthened in the summer of 1942 (3, Nos. 1450, 2068, S. 39). They were asked to pay particular attention to farmers whose sales of milk per cow seemed exceptionally low, or showed an undue trend toward summer production. These might be urged, with the threat of compulsion in the background, to grow sufficient winter feed for their beasts, to cull poor yielders, to arrange for more calvings the following autumn; technical officers would advise them on the management of their herds. A series of "Victory Churn" contests was launched. In each of six regions a miniature silver churn was awarded as a trophy for the county whose producers showed the greatest increase in milk sales compared with the previous year; there were also a national trophy and certificates of improvement for individual producers.

This drive for more milk was accomplished by important technical developments, not in themselves new, but new in their application to the whole dairying industry. The first of these was a national system for testing the quality of the milk supplied by each individual producer. The need for improving standards of quality had been long recognized; it became a matter of practical urgency in the hot summer of 1941, when the amount of milk that had to be rejected as unfit for sale sharply increased. Since even a small quantity of milk going prematurely sour might "infect" a large bulk consignment to a distant city, the problem went far beyond the actual incidence of unsatisfactory supplies. In the spring of 1942, therefore,

the Government launched a Milk Testing Scheme which had as its ultimate object the fortnightly testing of every registered producer's supplies. Since provision of staff and equipment had to be gradual, the scheme could only be extended by degrees; by the end of 1943, however, it included some 80 percent of the larger producers selling by wholesale, and the downward trend in quality was rather more than checked. Another scheme, under which farmers could, in return for a small subscription, have the health of their animals checked at regular intervals, with veterinary treatment as necessary, met with a rather poor response; less than 10 percent of cows had been enrolled in it by the end of 1944. By contrast, a voluntary national scheme for recording the milk output of individual cows was received with enthusiasm.

These measures, together with certain price adjustments and special bonuses, and aided by exceptionally mild winters in 1942/43 and 1943/44, assisted farmers to reverse the downward trend in milk production. From the low point of some 1,200 million gallons a year in 1941/42, a steady rise took sales to close on 1,350 million gallons in the last year of war, 1944/45. Even so, winter milk continued to be scarce, and the consumer without special priority continued to suffer severe restrictions, more particularly as the priority demands went on increasing. In one dry autumn after the war priority consumers had to endure cuts in order to preserve the nonpriority allowance at 2 pints per head per week. Not until 1949/50 was it possible to abandon restrictions at all seasons of the year, in spite of continually rising production.

CITATIONS

1 I Edw. 8 & I Geo. 6. C. 8. Pt. I.

2 S.R.&O. 1940.

3 S.R.&O. 1942.

4 S.R.&O. 1943.

5 S.R.&O. 1941.

6 For the work of the Committees as operators of farm machinery, see the Sixth and Eighteenth Reports from the House of Commons Select Committee on National Expenditure for 1940-41; in *Parliamentary Papers*, 1940-41, III.

7 Sir William H. Beveridge, *British Food Control* (London, 1928).

8 House of Commons, *Parliamentary Debates*, Fifth Series, Vol. 355, Dec. 13, 1939, cols. 1207-8.

9 R. N. Salaman, *The History and Social Influence of the Potato* (Cambridge, 1949).

10 K. A. H. Murray and R. S. G. Rutherford, *Milk Consumption Habits: Preliminary Report* (Univ. of Oxford, Agr. Econ. Res. Inst., Oxford, 1941).

CHAPTER 6

THE CONTROL OF MILK

BETWEEN THE WARS

The Ministry of Food's dealings with milk demand a chapter to themselves, not so much because of the supreme importance of milk as a food as because they mark the Ministry's farthest departure from its general rule of interfering as little as possible with the existing structure of the food trades. Over the war years, and in the name of the war effort, the Ministry was enabled to carry out, in England and Wales, a reorganization of milk marketing on lines laid down by the Government before the war, but then impeded by political obstacles. In the long interregnum between war and peace that followed the cease-fire of 1945, the position was consolidated. Those mainly instrumental in carrying out the policy came to be well aware of what they were doing: "It is nice," wrote one of them in 1943, "to think of our Minister plucking flowers from the graves of his predecessors."

War had come at a time when the British Government's policy for the milk industry was in a state of frustration and suspense. In 1933 there had been set up, under the enabling legislation introduced by first the Labour and then the "National" Governments under Ramsay MacDonald, four producer-controlled Milk Marketing Boards, of which by far the largest covered the whole of England and Wales. (The other three were in Scotland, where, for a number of reasons, the economic and political problems of milk marketing were by no means so complicated.) The English Milk Marketing Board, even more than the others, was primarily a financial device for regulating prices by prescription. The buyer of the milk paid the Board a price that varied according to the use to which it was put, being highest for sale in the liquid market and lower, in varying degrees, for different types of manufacture. The producer, however, received the same "pool price"—varying slightly from region to region, and subject to deductions, e.g., for transport costs—irrespective of use. He was not bound to sell his milk to the Board, though the Board must buy any milk tendered to it; the normal procedure was for buyer and seller to enter into a contract, to which the Board was

a party. Producer-retailers stood outside these arrangements, but had to be registered with the Board and pay a levy on gallonage sold, in order that they might share with their fellow producers the burden of the unprofitable sales for manufacture.

As a *quid pro quo* to the distributive trade for the loss of the superior bargaining power it had enjoyed before the Board was set up, the latter undertook to fix a minimum price for milk sold by retail, and to enforce it by withholding supplies. This price varied with the season and also according to the district, being lowest in rural areas or towns with less than 10,000 people, and highest in London. In effect, producer and distributor made an agreement to safeguard their interests at the expense of the retail customer.

Price maintenance of this sort is perfectly legal in the United Kingdom, but it aroused especially heavy criticism in the case of milk. Ever since World War I, the consensus of "informed" opinion had been that milk distribution costs were far too high. The official Reorganisation Commission whose report (1), dated 1933, had preceded the establishment of the Milk Marketing Schemes, had asserted that there were too many distributors, often offering an unnecessarily costly type of service that set the level for all distributive margins. This opinion, itself echoing the views of official reports of 1919 and 1924, was repeated by no less than three further reports in 1936 and 1937 (2; 3; 4). For social and economic reformers, it was axiomatic that there were "too many milkmen in every city street."

In 1933 the Government, acting on these repeated recommendations, had at length introduced a Milk Industry Bill in the House of Commons. It proposed to set up, alongside the Milk Marketing Boards, a Milk Commission for Great Britain with powers to reform distribution, including the introduction, by way of experiment, of not more than ten local "rationalization" schemes limiting the number of retailers who might deliver in any one street. In addition, provision was made, on health grounds, for the eventual prohibition of the sale of raw milk, other than tuberculin-tested milk, under a system of local option. The larger distributors acquiesced in the proposals; but a storm of opposition broke from farmers, from the Boards, the smaller distributors, and the producer-retailers. Some of these objected to compulsory "pasteurization" or other heat-treatment; others, to the establishment of a Commission that must weaken producer control; others again feared that the distributive reforms would cause them to lose their livelihood. The Government bowed to the protests and (though it had an overwhelming majority in the

House of Commons) withdrew the measure before it reached second reading.

The wartime plans for milk could not but be affected by this ignominious defeat. The first scheme considered by the Food (Defence Plans) Department, at the end of 1937, had been drastic; the contract system would be abolished in the event of war and the Food Controller become the sole purchaser of milk, other than that sold by the producer-retailers. The Milk Marketing Boards and the organs of the distributors in England and Scotland, respectively, would jointly be responsible, under the instructions of the Ministry of Food, for allocating milk between consuming areas and alternative uses. Prices would be controlled at all stages; rationing, with a consumer-retailer tie, was contemplated in the event of shortage. Moreover, there was talk of a complete reorganization of wartime distribution, including such measures as the restriction of deliveries to one per day and the limitation of the number of retailers who might serve any one street.

These early proposals envisaged the complete subordination of the existing Milk Marketing Boards to the Ministry of Food; indeed, it was powerfully argued as late as the spring of 1939 that the marketing schemes for milk ought to be suspended completely in wartime. By this time, however, the urgency of preparations had caused the Food (Defence Plans) Department to enlist the assistance of the English Board in working out the details of a milk control; and the Board, naturally enough, sought to maintain its dominant influence, already threatened by the abortive Milk Industry Bill. Not without misgivings, therefore, officials acquiesced in a new scheme of control that retained the system of contracts and pool prices, to be administered as hitherto by the Marketing Boards, but that reserved overriding powers to the Food Controller, who would guarantee the producers' price. In effect there was superimposed on the existing marketing scheme a top hamper of guaranteed prices, in return for which the Ministry of Food would in theory be able to control milk supplies. In practice, however, the Boards would be in a strong position to influence the policy of their nominal overlord. Indeed, the General Manager of the English Board was designated Director of Milk Supplies in the future Ministry of Food. Control in this form was introduced, after a rather confused interregnum period, in the summer of 1940.

As with other commodities, there was no practical alternative to making use of the staff of the English Milk Marketing Board both

in the preparation of control plans and in their execution, when the time came. But whereas it had proved possible to negotiate amicably the suspension, "for the duration," of other marketing bodies, e.g., for pigs, bacon, and potatoes, and thus reduce the dangers of dual allegiance to a minimum, this was not to be so for milk; moreover, the existing balance of power in the industry, tilted as it was in favor of producer interests, was carried over into the first year of control. Had the proposals of the Milk Industry Bill been successfully put into effect before the war, the Ministry of Food would probably have had less difficulty in enforcing its policy.

In the first year of war, however, the latent conflict of producer and national interest did not come out into the open, mainly because a shortage of milk for liquid consumption developed only slowly. The autumn of 1939 was mild, and sales of milk off farms were higher than in the previous year by as much as ten percent; demand for liquid milk, on the other hand, fell, and with it the pool prices realized under the Marketing Scheme, since more milk had to go for manufacture. At the same time, the scarcity and high price of imported feedstuffs were the chief among several causes of rising production costs; if these found their natural reflection in increased retail prices, the demand for milk might fall still further. Alarm lest the health of the "vulnerable groups" in the population should suffer from drinking too little milk led to the introduction of the *National Milk Scheme*, which came into force in July 1940, and provided daily a pint of milk at 2d. (for the poorest, free) for children under five and for expectant mothers. Even before this date the downward consumption trend had shown signs of reversing itself; thereafter it climbed inexorably and before long impelled the Ministry to introduce restrictions for "nonpriority" consumers.

The decision of the Government to encourage milk production and subsidize milk consumption naturally focused attention once again on its distribution costs; if these could be reduced, the financial burden of subsidies would be by that much the less. Indeed, a general subsidy to milk prices, as distinct from the special subsidy embodied in the National Milk Scheme, might (it was hoped) be avoided altogether. In wartime, however, the natural trend of distribution costs was of course upward; in January 1940 the trade put forward a claim for an increase in their gross profit margins amounting to 1d. a gallon. The Ministry of Food resisted this claim, asserting that distributors might meet increased costs by improved organization; but it undertook to examine sample accounts in order

to see whether a case could be made out for higher margins. At the same time, distributors were assured by the then Minister that the fact of war would not be made a pretext for permanent changes in the structure of the milk industry. (Any attempt to do so might have been challenged in the Courts as *ultra vires* the Defence Regulations, which conferred emergency powers on Government only in so far as they were necessary to the prosecution of the war.) The costings inquiry did in fact uphold the distributors' claim; and this was accordingly granted as from July 1, 1940. But the Ministry insisted that this concession must be contingent on their making immediate efforts to reform distribution so as to get costs down; and in the middle of June, Lord Woolton appointed an independent committee of inquiry "to investigate the present costs of distributing milk in Great Britain and to advise what steps would have to be taken in order to bring about a substantial reduction in such costs."

THE "PERRY" INQUIRY INTO DISTRIBUTION COSTS

The appointment of the Perry Committee (so-called from its Chairman, Lord Perry, the head of the Ford Motor Company in England) was construed as an indication that the new Minister of Food meant business, and received a good Press. Neither the Committee nor, perhaps, the Minister himself, seems to have been aware of an overriding limitation on the latter's wartime powers, or of the undertaking given by his predecessor earlier in the year. (Mr. W. S. Morrison, who as Minister of Agriculture in 1938 had had to withdraw the Milk Industry Bill, would scarcely have been so sanguine about the possibilities of reform.) Indeed, the Committee appears to have supposed that the threat of drastic action by Government could be used to compel the distributors "to put their house in order" (5, par. 53). The phrase is characteristic of the Committee's approach to its problem, and one that helps to explain the indignation of the distributors when confronted with its recommendations. It was not as if (they might argue) the Ministry of Food was being uniformly tough about trading margins; the Ministry had, for instance, been conspicuously, if unintentionally, generous to retail butchers. Why should milkmen be singled out for special treatment, at the instance of a group of men who, however capable and experienced, had no firsthand knowledge of the milk trade?

Since the distributors, quite naturally, rejected *tout court* the major premise that had been given to the Committee, namely, the need for a fundamental reform in distributive methods, it was

scarcely surprising that they should not have been fruitful in suggestions for reducing costs, and should have found objection to many of those the Committee put forward. The Committee's investigation of costs led it to conclude that the main influence determining them was the amount of service the distributor provided. At the one extreme there was the co-operative society in Aberdeen, which offered but one delivery per day, granted no credit, and employed much juvenile labor, and whose customers were densely massed: its total costs were less than 6*d.* a gallon. At the other, there were the big distributors (including the co-operative societies) in London, whose costs were double that amount. Generally speaking, said the Committee, "the expensive distributors complicate the simple business of milk delivery by combining it with the sale of other goods" (5, par. 11), maintaining elaborate shops, absorbing the time and energy of the roundsman, and demanding from him higher qualifications than would be required for milk deliveries alone. The development of these services had been due, the Committee thought, to the frustration of price competition by the minimum-price provisions of the Milk Marketing Boards' contract; although distributors claimed that the supply of goods other than milk went in aid of overhead expenses, the reverse might be the case.

Having established that it was possible for milk to be distributed in some districts for as little as 6*d.* a gallon, the Committee went on to argue that the methods that made this possible could be, and ought to be, adopted everywhere. If, for instance, the half-pint bottle were abolished; if consumers paid on the nail, or in advance, for their milk; if no other goods were carried on the round; and if such service items as the elaborate shops of the big London distributors were abandoned, the Committee estimated that a national retail margin of 8*d.* a gallon would cover all reasonable costs and allow a sufficient profit. It recommended the Minister, therefore, to enforce these economies by prescribing a maximum retail price that should allow of an 8*d.* margin, and also to abolish the minimum price hitherto fixed by the Marketing Boards. In order to give traders some time to adjust their methods, the new price might be introduced by stages, to be complete on April 1, 1941, six months from the signing of the Committee's Report.

The Perry Report was published on October 23, 1940. Written with a force and lucidity rare in such documents, it got a good Press and, of course, a hearty welcome from those quarters that had long criticized the milk trade. Those who would be affected by its recom-

mendations were naturally less friendly. Distributors varied in their attitude to specific reforms, such as the abolition of credit; but they were unanimous in declaring that none of those for which they were willing would bring about economies on the scale proposed by the Committee. The 8*d.* margin, they declared, was purely hypothetical, based on instances unrepresentative of the trade as a whole; it would call for revolutionary changes, the effect of which could not be measured in advance. Not even the Co-operative Movement, despite the encomiums the Committee had bestowed on it, was prepared to break with the rest of the trade on this point.

For the Ministry of Food, which would have to take the responsibility either of accepting or rejecting the Perry recommendations, the need to preserve the goodwill of the trade became, as almost always in food control, the dominating influence on decision. Two developments since the Committee had begun its work emphasized this need more strongly. The German air raids were in full swing; milk distribution had become hazardous and (of course) more expensive, and the trade had spared no effort to keep it going. To attack retailers' margins now would enable them to enlist public sympathy that would outweigh the vocal minority of enthusiasts on the other side. Second, the supply position, in the face of rising consumption, had deteriorated to a point at which restrictions on non-priority consumers would be necessary; and these would only be workable with the support of the trade.

From the very moment when the report was received, therefore, the Ministry was aware that the root-and-branch changes proposed by the Perry Committee were not practical politics. For a time it hoped, however, that some steps might be made toward them if only as a gesture; that, for instance, the 8*d.* margin might be established "in principle," i.e., for the small part of the total supply that was sold "over the counter" instead of being delivered to the door (a proposal rejected by the Committee), and that the minimum-price rule might be set aside.

In the course of Ministerial discussion, however, it became clear that the feeling of the Government as a whole was against half measures that might upset distribution without achieving substantial economies. On March 18, 1941, Lord Woolton announced in the House of Lords that the Government, while not differing from the view expressed in the Report, would not put its recommendations into force under present conditions (6).

That the winter of 1940/41 was untimely for introducing changes

in milk distribution, other than those imperatively called for by the war situation, may be accepted without argument. But the very fact that the Perry proposals were inopportune meant that their intrinsic merit was more or less taken for granted at the time, and that the arguments on the other side were discounted as coming from interested parties. The writer feels that this does the distributors' case less than justice and that, indeed, it suffered from the traditional prejudice against the middleman that producers and reformers have so frequently sought to exploit. On the narrow issue of margins, it seems to him that the Perry Committee failed to analyze with sufficient care the reasons why, as it was well aware, margins in London were higher than in any other part of the country; it assumed rather than demonstrated that this was solely due to distributors' extravagant habits. The Committee neglected also the influence on costs of the heavy premiums that had to be paid on "accommodation milk," i.e., milk bought casually to meet demands over and above the amount that could be supplied on contract at the standard prices. These exactions meant that few retailers would realize the full nominal margin on all the milk they sold.

"Competition through service," rather than through price, was in course of development in the retail milk market long before the legal prescription of a minimum; and it seems likely that it had been influenced, at any rate in part, by the general trends of retail distribution and by the impossibility of making a cut in the price sufficiently substantial to increase sales. After all, the Perry Committee's recommendation represented a reduction of at most one halfpenny a pint (as the Minister pointed out to the House of Lords when he announced the rejection of the Committee's findings). Moreover, as a skeptical member of a postwar Committee of Inquiry (7, Add. II) has remarked, the degree of distributive service is itself a factor in the standard of living and there is no need to segregate the distribution of milk from that of other foods.

These are matters for research and argument; the comments above are only offered as a caveat against too ready acceptance of the Perry conclusions merely because they appear untainted by any suggestion of sinister interest. But there is one other comment that ought to be made on the Report as a whole, namely, that it repeatedly presumed to make quasi-moral judgments on the actions of groups of people, by reference to standards of tidy organization that were purely arbitrary. The producer-retailer, for instance, was said to have "complicated the problem of milk distribution by extending

his activities over the frontier between town and country and so making it difficult for the ordinary urban distributor to plan his rounds economically" (5, par. 46). Such a statement betrays crass unawareness of the nature of economic development in a free and complex society. In many instances, of course, the producer-retailer in urban areas is not an interloper, but a survivor. The same air of rebuke occurs in references to the activities of the distributors, as though they were under some moral obligation to assent to their critics' views about the way to run their businesses.

Such instances of cant could, of course, be matched by quotations on the other side; one would think, to read the protestations of some of the dairy firms, that none of them was concerned with anything so sordid as profit. The exchange of quasi-moral sentiments, however, is simply an obstacle to detached and thorough investigation. So far as milk is concerned, such investigation will be fruitless or dangerous unless it goes deeper than the Perry Committee and its predecessors—into such matters as the movement and distribution of population, for instance. To confront powerful vested interests with proposals for reform that are no more than short cuts based on guesswork not only invites defeat but deserves it.

Were it not for the publicity that the Perry Report received, it might have been passed over in a history of wartime food control as unimportant apart from the incidental evidence it brought to light. Even before the decision to shelve the Report had been reached, it was clear to the Ministry of Food that the reduction of costs must be secondary, in wartime, to the maintenance of distribution and the fair allocation of supplies. So far as the first was concerned, the air raids were, as it turned out, less important than the ever more pressing shortages of manpower and materials. The second forced the Ministry of Food into urgent measures to match a diminishing supply of milk to an increased demand partly, but not wholly, due to the National Milk Scheme for mothers and children.

QUASI RATIONING

As early as the summer of 1940 the Ministry, foreseeing that it might need stronger powers to regulate the movement of milk, but at the same time desiring to act through, rather than against, the existing Milk Marketing Boards, had caused Statutory Orders to be made that at once modified and extended the peacetime powers that the Boards had hitherto exercised (8, Nos. 1330, 1716-19). The

in milk distribution, other than those imperatively called for by the war situation, may be accepted without argument. But the very fact that the Perry proposals were inopportune meant that their intrinsic merit was more or less taken for granted at the time, and that the arguments on the other side were discounted as coming from interested parties. The writer feels that this does the distributors' case less than justice and that, indeed, it suffered from the traditional prejudice against the middleman that producers and reformers have so frequently sought to exploit. On the narrow issue of margins, it seems to him that the Perry Committee failed to analyze with sufficient care the reasons why, as it was well aware, margins in London were higher than in any other part of the country; it assumed rather than demonstrated that this was solely due to distributors' extravagant habits. The Committee neglected also the influence on costs of the heavy premiums that had to be paid on "accommodation milk," i.e., milk bought casually to meet demands over and above the amount that could be supplied on contract at the standard prices. These exactions meant that few retailers would realize the full nominal margin on all the milk they sold.

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his activities over the frontier between town and country and so making it difficult for the ordinary urban distributor to plan his rounds economically" (5, par. 46). Such a statement betrays crass unawareness of the nature of economic development in a free and complex society. In many instances, of course, the producer-retailer in urban areas is not an interloper, but a survivor. The same air of rebuke occurs in references to the activities of the distributors, as though they were under some moral obligation to assent to their critics' views about the way to run their businesses.

Such instances of cant could, of course, be matched by quotations on the other side; one would think, to read the protestations of some of the dairy firms, that none of them was concerned with anything so sordid as profit. The exchange of quasi-moral sentiments, however, is simply an obstacle to detached and thorough investigation. So far as milk is concerned, such investigation will be fruitless or dangerous unless it goes deeper than the Perry Committee and its predecessors—into such matters as the movement and distribution of population, for instance. To confront powerful vested interests with proposals for reform that are no more than short cuts based on guesswork not only invites defeat but deserves it.

Were it not for the publicity that the Perry Report received, it might have been passed over in a history of wartime food control as unimportant apart from the incidental evidence it brought to light. Even before the decision to shelve the Report had been reached, it was clear to the Ministry of Food that the reduction of costs must be secondary, in wartime, to the maintenance of distribution and the fair allocation of supplies. So far as the first was concerned, the air raids were, as it turned out, less important than the ever more pressing shortages of manpower and materials. The second forced the Ministry of Food into urgent measures to match a diminishing supply of milk to an increased demand partly, but not wholly, due to the National Milk Scheme for mothers and children.

QUASI RATIONING

As early as the summer of 1940 the Ministry, foreseeing that it might need stronger powers to regulate the movement of milk, but at the same time desiring to act through, rather than against, the existing Milk Marketing Boards, had caused Statutory Orders to be made that at once modified and extended the peacetime powers that the Boards had hitherto exercised (8, Nos. 1330, 1716-19). The

right of producers to call for the suspension of the Marketing Schemes, and the right of appeal to the Minister of Agriculture against decisions thereunder (which might otherwise have been used against the Ministry of Food) were suspended "for the duration." Shortly afterward the Marketing Boards were given wide powers over the sale and movement of milk, these powers being subject to the consent of the Minister; but—more especially since the English Board's General Manager was the Ministry of Food's Director of Milk Supplies—it is clear that the Boards enjoyed a great measure of discretion.

Beside strengthening the legal framework of milk control, the Ministry took various measures to secure that a larger share of total milk supplies should be available for approved purposes; in September 1940, the making of cream, which had already been restricted, was prohibited entirely; in October, the manufacture of condensed and dried milk was made subject to Ministry license; and in November and December, the use of milk or milk products in artificial cream and ice cream was similarly controlled (8, Nos. 1714, 1788, 1912, 2028-29). The Ministry's problem was twofold: on the one hand, to secure a sufficiency of milk for liquid consumption in the winter; on the other, to make sure that enough milk was used in the flush season for essential products such as cheese, condensed milk, and milk powder.

For a few weeks in the mid-winter of 1940/41 there had been a shortage of milk on the liquid market, and when officials came to cast up the milk budget for 1941/42, they found that it revealed a deficit that could only be met by restrictions on liquid consumption. About 145 million gallons would, they estimated, be available for manufacture, as against requirements totaling 300 million gallons; even if the latter were pruned by prohibiting nonessential uses of milk products, particularly in bread, flour, and sugar confectionery (9, No. 431, amended by No. 657), and cutting down by half releases of evaporated milk, there would still be a gap of about 50 million gallons. They proposed that this should be bridged by cutting down liquid supplies to nonpriority consumers by one-seventh, starting in April 1941, the beginning of the milk year.

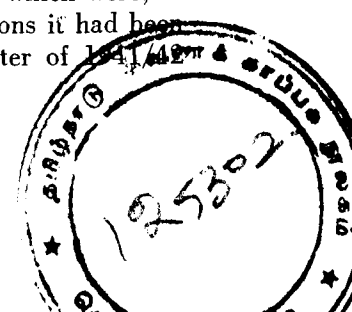
How was this cut to be made? There was no nodal point in the existing pattern of milk distribution at which control could be applied and supplies adjusted. Milk might be sold at retail by the farmer himself (the producer-retailer); it might be collected at large country depots, at which it would be bulked, cooled, and (unless

it was used for manufacture into butter, cheese, or dried milk on the spot) forwarded in road or rail tanks, mainly to London wholesalers or retailers; these depots were mostly in the western part of the country. Again, it might pass direct from farm to wholesaler or retailer. All these movements, producer-retailer excepted, were governed in England and Wales by contracts between individual producers and distributors under the aegis of the English Milk Marketing Board. To set aside the provisions of these contracts, let alone to supersede the system in the interests of better distribution, was a step for which the Ministry, notwithstanding the powers it had lately conferred on the Marketing Boards, was administratively not ready. Instead, it sought the co-operation of the distributors in working what was virtually, though not in form, a voluntary restriction of deliveries. Representatives of the trade undertook to work out the details of a scheme, the principle of which was given legal effect in the Sale of Milk (Restriction) Order (9, No. 503).

No sooner had the Order come into force, on April 9, 1941, than it became clear, first, that the rank and file of milk traders were, to say the least, not eager to make it work (this is hardly surprising since it would reduce their profits); and second, that the refinements and mitigations that it urgently needed were bound to reduce the savings it effected. The instruction to all dairymen to cut the quantity of nonpriority milk they sold to each and every household by one-seventh was patently, one would have thought, unworkable; it took no account of new customers, such as air-raid refugees, or children home from school for the Easter holidays. Relaxations were immediately necessary to meet these cases; more important, in response to public clamor, the Ministry also agreed to exempt from the cuts households that had taken one pint or less per day—only realizing afterward, it seems, that these accounted for three-fifths or more of the total. The concessions not only reduced the paper saving; they rendered it impossible to police the scheme by reference to the individual dairyman's previous performance. Within a matter of weeks it was clear that nothing like the expected 50 million gallons would be saved over the six months. The best that could be said for it was that it may have put some brake on continually rising consumption.

The failure to secure, through summer restrictions, sufficient milk for the manufacturing program—supplies for which were, in fact, to fall short by more than the 50 million gallons it had been proposed to save—meant, of course, that the winter of 1941/42

J. S. G. 1941



promised to be that much more difficult, particularly if, as was expected, yields continued to fall. As early as May 1941, therefore, the Ministry began to talk openly of rationing milk, and during the summer a complete rationing scheme was put before interested Government Departments and other parties.

Milk rationing, in the British sense of that term, would indeed have been a formidable undertaking. It would have meant tying each consumer to a retailer, fixing differential entitlements for different types of consumer, and adjusting each retailer's supplies to the requirements of his registered customers. Both retailer and consumer would be breaking the law if more than the exact ration were taken; but the Ministry would be bound to see that not less than this amount was made available. For a commodity like milk, the supply of which varies from week to week and even from day to day, such conditions were incapable of fulfillment; the Ministry could no more let surplus milk run to waste than it could undertake to make good all shortages. Moreover, there were some 200,000 self-suppliers of milk who, with their families, dependents, and friends, could not have been brought within any rationing scheme. That in the end the Ministry should have stopped short of full rationing is therefore less remarkable than that the prospect of full rationing should ever have been taken seriously, more particularly in the trade. The so-called *Scheme of Supply* that was eventually introduced in October (9, No. 1604) did, in fact, approach as near to rationing as was practicable, and did, moreover, imply a complete reorganization of the trade—how complete was not generally realized until the scheme had been a year in force.

The position of milk under the new arrangements resembled that of eggs. Priority domestic consumers (expectant mothers, children under 18, certain classes of invalids), together with children at school and hospital patients, were guaranteed a ration in varying quantities. All milk remaining after priority claims had been met was to be divided equally between adult consumers; the Ministry, rather reluctantly, undertook to announce the estimated nonpriority allowance per head. No guaranty was given that this amount would be available to each and every registered customer; but the Ministry did undertake, through a special Milk Movements Branch, to see that retailers got enough milk to meet their legitimate requirements, priority and nonpriority.

A wholesale readjustment of supplies to balance requirements was, however, impossible; retailers were obliged to report the exist-

ence of surpluses, but even when they did so these could not be transferred readily to others, since milk supply was still a matter of individual contracts between farmer and buyer, with which the Ministry could interfere only seldom and with solid and enduring reason. Producer-retailers were even more difficult to bring within the scheme; it was impracticable to collect and transport casual surpluses of milk that they might have for disposal, even should they admit to them; those operating in areas with a population of less than 30,000 were not required even in theory to surrender such surpluses.

When, therefore, in November 1941, a seasonal cut in supplies was announced, coupled with a reduction in the nonpriority allowance to 2 pints per head per week, its effect was felt in varying degrees by different classes of distributors and hence by their customers. Producer-retailers suffered comparatively little; by contrast, the large multiples and the Co-operative Societies were badly hit. The latter claimed to have an exceptionally high proportion of "priority" trade; it followed that when a cut of, say, 10 percent was made in all liquid supplies, their nonpriority customers went short. Largely on account of their representations, the Ministry hurried forward the issue, on December 27, of a Milk Diversion Order (9, No. 2126) which, on paper, placed producer-retailers on the same footing as others, so far as the reporting and diversion of surpluses were concerned. The new Order put an end, for the moment, to trade complaints about the privileged position of producer-retailers; but the complicated form of return required under it was widely criticized. Thousands of small retailers—too many to be prosecuted—ignored it. With the raising of the flour extraction rate, at the end of March 1942, supplies of wheat feed for dairy cows were bound to fall sharply; and the Ministry of Food, contemplating a worse supply position to come, even in the summer, had to recognize that its machinery was not yet adequate to secure fair distribution. However, contrary to expectations, milk yields rose from April 1942 onward; on May 23 all restrictions on liquid sales had to be lifted for want of manufacturing capacity, and they were not reimposed until the seasonal fall in production set in at the end of July.

A NEW PRICE STRUCTURE: RATIONALIZATION OF DISTRIBUTION

Meanwhile the Ministry had been working out—in arduous negotiations with the Ministry of Agriculture, the English Milk Marketing Board, and the trade—a fundamental change in the marketing

arrangements for milk in England and Wales (10). (In Scotland, where the control exercised by the Marketing Boards had proved to be sufficiently adaptable to wartime purposes, no such change was thought necessary.) The system of contracts between producers, Board, and distributors was to be abolished, and with it the complicated system of prices that varied with the purpose for which the milk was used, the district in which it was sold, and whether it was for regular or "accommodation" supply. (Accommodation supplies are those bought by a trader to supplement deficiencies in his regular contract supplies, and habitually command a premium over contract price; a scramble for accommodation supplies during the two previous winters had forced up these premiums and evoked many complaints.)

Instead, from October 1, 1942, the Milk Marketing Board was itself to become the sole purchaser of milk from producers, other than producer-retailers. The Board would resell the milk to the Ministry of Food, which in its turn would instantaneously resell to manufacturers and distributors. The price would be uniform for all milk passing test as suitable for the liquid market. The producer's individual liability for transport costs would cease at the point of first delivery, instead of at the consuming center, as hitherto; the Milk Marketing Board would undertake responsibility, on behalf of producers, for milk collection, and transport from the point of first delivery to the consumer would be borne by the Ministry of Food. Thus the way would be open, it was thought, for a complete reorganization of the movement of milk from producer to retailer. Collection could be "rationalized" to meet the claims of wartime transport economy, instead of being bound by individual contracts; and all milk, other than that sold by the elusive producer-retailer, could be directed to the places where it was needed.

Coupled with this change in organization was a new "functional" or, rather, categorical price structure. The retailer would get his milk at a substantially uniform price, whether he bought from farm or wholesaler; where the intervention of one or more further links in the chain of distribution was necessary, these would be remunerated by a series of Ministry allowances, calculated on gallonage. The breaking up of the "over-all" distributive margin into a series of allowances related to the performance of definite functions, that could be "costed" by the Ministry's accountants, would, it was declared, make it possible for the Government to keep track of any financial savings that the rationalization of distribution might bring

about, and thus lead, at long last, to the reduction in margins that the Perry Committee and its predecessors had declared was desirable.

Such a reform was not to be accomplished without patience, firmness, and a willingness to compromise on lesser matters. It was, after all, but four years since clamor from vested interests had brought about the withdrawal of the Milk Industry Bill. Thus it was on grounds of expediency, not of functional necessity, that the Milk Marketing Board was made the sole purchaser of milk at first hand. Even so, there was a head-on collision over the new price structure. Producers, and with them the Marketing Board, were shocked at a system that, because it remunerated a trader in respect of each of a number of operations that he might perform, gave higher gross margins to the larger firms. The so-called "self-wholesaling allowance," paid to multiple dairymen who might be said to perform wholesaling functions for their own retail shops, came under especially heavy fire, since the Ministry had made gallonage the qualification for its receipt. The Board maintained that to pay the bigger dairymen simply for being big would "strengthen the position of the middleman, lead to unnecessary services, and increase the real spread between producers' and consumers' prices"; and it was on this issue that the Board's General Manager resigned his post as Director of Milk Supplies in the Ministry (11).

Defenders of the new price structure argued that it was justified by costings investigations and that the larger firms' *net* profits were not thereby increased. The Ministry of Food claimed, moreover, that unnecessary movements of milk would not be allowed to occur, even though the new price structure did remove the incentive to sales direct from the producer. Approval would be given to more roundabout dealings, and payment made to wholesalers and depot proprietors in respect of them, only when the Ministry considered them to be justified. Nevertheless, as a postwar Committee of Inquiry was to remark (7, par. 99), the amount of milk passing through country depots increased between 1938/39 and 1946/47, more than in proportion to the increase in farm sales, and notwithstanding the much smaller quantity that was being used for manufacture in the later year. One might perhaps have expected that the diversion of supplies to the liquid market would have caused the depots to lose ground, compared with direct sales.

It does not appear, however, that the new price structure had any very great influence on milk movements, taken as a whole. On

the contrary, the Ministry of Food found that despite the uniform price to the distributor, he preferred to maintain his direct contacts with the producer; and so great was the outcry against any interference with these that the Ministry forebore to change them save in a few exceptional cases. The rationalization of milk collection from farms, undertaken on a large scale from 1942 to 1945, was, that is to say, confined mainly to the depot trade; and it was the milk passing through depots that was used by the Ministry to adjust the balance of consumption as between one area and another. The acquiescence of depot proprietors in this was secured by the adoption of what was called the gallon-for-gallon rule, namely, that no consignee should handle less milk as a result of farm rationalization than he did previously. It followed that total gallonage handled by depots not only could not diminish, but was likely to increase at least *pari passu* with the increase in production. That it did in fact increase more than this may be attributed to a number of additional causes: namely, to the geographical situation of most of the depots in the part of the country where production rose most sharply; to the increased seasonality of production, which meant a danger of overloading facilities for treating milk other than those at depots; and to the provision, under the control scheme, for each retailer to nominate a wholesaler for at any rate part of his supplies, so that the latter virtually acquired an entitlement to handle a certain quantity of milk. In short, while the influences tending to force milk through more indirect channels were allowed free play, the gallon-for-gallon rule prevented any opposing trend from operating.

Whereas, that is to say, the legal breach with the old contract system was absolute, the extent to which the Ministry made use of it to effect a complete reorganization of the trade was limited. The existence of a chain of depots made it possible to balance liquid supplies with consumption, and at the same time to make sizable transport economies without, so to speak, interrupting the traffic. It is true that some of the compromises made with trade interests may, as has been suggested (7, par. 107), get in the way of radical postwar reforms. But the whole doctrine of British war economy, as well as the emergency powers granted to the Minister of Food, forbade changes not essential to the prosecution of the war. By that criterion, the basic change in the milk marketing system was more significant than the practical limitations that were put on its operation.

By comparison, the schemes for rationalizing urban retail deliveries, though they called for much patient labor and had a more obvious impact on the consumer, were transient in importance, though not so transient as had been expected at the time they were introduced. The majority of these schemes came into operation during 1943, and were continued until 1949. Broadly speaking, they provided for the allocation, by exchange of customers, to each dairyman of exclusive delivery rights in a block of adjacent streets. (In three towns, of which Carlisle was the largest, a wartime "merger" of dairymen was arranged.) Co-operative societies, of which there was normally only one in each town, were left out of these arrangements because many consumers might raise political objections to being forced either to take or not to take co-operative milk. Once a rationalization scheme was drawn up, the Ministry of Food "froze" all consumer registrations for milk in that area (with certain exceptions, such as providing for the supply of tuberculin-tested milk).

At their peak, these rationalization schemes numbered 580, and covered nearly 80 percent of the population. They were estimated then to have saved approximately one-third of the total vehicle-miles employed in milk delivery at the time of their initiation, and comparable savings in manpower and rubber tires. These economies were most marked in London, where prewar distributive costs were highest; even there, however, they were financially less spectacular than the claims of prewar reformers might have led one to expect. So far from overlapping deliveries in the same street being largely responsible for the high price of milk, it appears from cost accounts that their elimination made a difference of only about 1*d.* a gallon, even at rates of wages enhanced by war. Other economies—such as the discontinuance of the second daily delivery; delivery later in the day (consequent on longer milk "rounds"); the arbitrary determination, under milk "rationing," of the amount each household might have, so that the milkman had no longer to solicit orders; and the reduction in overheads that followed from increased consumption of milk—were thought to be more important. Without these, as well as rationalization, it was thought that distribution costs would have risen by at least 4*d.* a gallon more than they actually did. As it was, the average distributive margin rose only by about 1*d.* between 1939 and 1945—and this at a time when the price received by the producer had more than doubled.

SAFER MILK

Another reform that was of permanent importance, though a quite genuine pretext for it was found in war conditions, was the "Safe Milk" policy, adumbrated in the White Paper of May 1942. One of the most controversial proposals in the prewar Milk Industry Bill had been that for the compulsory heat-treatment of all milk sold for direct human consumption. Favored by medical and scientific opinion, it was unpopular with a section of the public and with producer- and other small retailers, who saw in it the thin end of a wedge that was to drive them out of business. By 1942 several influences had combined to make the Ministry of Food revive the proposal. There was its own consciousness of responsibility for milk supplies as a welfare service. There was the need to reduce souring and waste at a time of shortage. There was the disturbing rise, since the war had begun, in the incidence of tuberculosis—a rise attributed by expert opinion (12) in part to milk-borne infection. Finally, there was the fact that the Ministry, by imposing compulsory rationalization schemes, was depriving the consumer of the right to choose his supplier and was therefore under an obligation to see that he received safe milk.

It was largely on the last ground that the Ministry relied in the long negotiations with the various interests that now ensued, and that finally took shape in another White Paper, issued in July 1943 (13). As described in the White Paper, the "Measures to Improve the Quality of the Nation's Milk Supply" were twofold. There was a long-term policy, for which the Agricultural Departments were responsible, for improving the quality of milk as produced; and there was a short-term policy, under which the Ministry of Food would prohibit the sale of raw milk (other than tuberculin-tested and "accredited" milk) in those areas where retail rationalization schemes were in force.

The words of the White Paper imply that active measures were about to be taken. In fact, however, despite much preliminary work, and the passing of a special Defence Regulation (55G) conferring the necessary powers on the Minister of Food (14, No. 65), the practical difficulties proved to be too great to allow any progress to be made during the war. Labor and materials were simply not available for the extension of dairy buildings or the supply of the extra machinery that would have been required, had compulsory heat-treatment for "ordinary" milk been introduced in more than a few areas. Indeed, during the war the adoption of the policy may ac-

tually have hindered the spread of pasteurization by halting the movement toward rationalization of deliveries. The Ministry of Food, having used the latter as a peg on which to hang the former, felt that it could not proceed to deprive customers in the rural areas, where no present hope of safer milk could be held out, of the right to choose their own supplier; and it therefore abandoned its original intention to enforce zoning of milk deliveries in areas with a population of less than 10,000. One of the indirect effects of rationalization was that it encouraged small traders to sell out to their larger competitors, who, because the customers were held captive by the Ministry of Food, were willing to pay high prices to extend their businesses in the only way now open to them. The larger the scale of a milk retailer's operations, the more likely he was to resort to pasteurization, which would probably, therefore, have spread more quickly in the rural areas had rationalization been extended to them. It is not possible to say, however, to what extent this effect may have been felt.

The Labour Government, after the war, was persuaded to reiterate the policy of its predecessor, and in May 1949 an Act of Parliament embodying it passed into law. Even so, it was not until 1951 that the first areas, London and Portsmouth, in which no raw milk (except tuberculin-tested) might be sold, were scheduled under the Act; so much had promise run ahead of performance. In this, as in other aspects of milk policy, the promise was all important. The Government had gone beyond accomplishing its wartime aims of maintaining the supply and distributing it fairly, with special provision for the "vulnerable groups." Those aims, one feels, could have been achieved by simpler means than were actually employed in England and Wales, even when due allowance had been made for the complex and politically explosive situation that the Ministry of Food inherited, as a result of the withdrawal of the Milk Industry Bill. But the exigencies of war had been skilfully used to promote just the objectives toward which prewar reformers had been moving. Most important, perhaps, the balance between producer and distributor interest, overset by the foundation of Marketing Boards, had been redressed and held firm by the Ministry's Milk Division. There was at least a chance that the industry, after the war, would not again become an economic battleground.

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CHAPTER 7

TOWARD COMPLETE CONTROL, 1942/43

RELUCTANCE TO EXTEND RATIONING

By November 1918 the first Ministry of Food, wrote Beveridge (1, p. 268), "controlled nearly everything that men could eat or drink without being poisoned . . . it was stretching out its tentacles over soap and candles, salt and aerated waters." The framers of the second Ministry, if they foresaw a similar destiny for their creation, put it firmly from their minds. Their task, as they saw it, was to prepare for the "principal foods" the machinery of control without which, if war came, the Government of the day would be unable to act; and this, with their tiny resources, proved difficult enough—would indeed have proved impossible had not they been authorized, after Munich, to call in outside aid. As war approached, the details of preparation became all-absorbing; a deterrent to those given to thinking about general principles, a refuge to those, perhaps the majority, for whom such thinking was an unwelcome though sometimes unavoidable discipline. In the years when the prospect of war was distant, almost academic, the broad outlines of the war economy had been sketched in Whitehall memoranda; now that the danger was pressing, the picture was not so much filled in by, as obscured beneath, an active, common-sense empiricism. It was as if mobilization were to become a substitute for the work of the general staff.

An empiricist Food Controller is a contradiction in terms; and though the first few months after war broke out, when the Ministry was building up its organization, were not notable for system in action (there was, for instance, the occasion when two Divisions of the Ministry were openly but unconsciously pulling in opposite directions about supplies of barley and sugar for brewing), it early became evident that some sort of "brain trust" would be required to foresee and co-ordinate the extremely complex measures that the growing demands of war would compel the Ministry to take. Such a body was set up, at the end of 1940, as the Ministry's *General Department*, and it had very considerable influence on food policy thereafter. But it was, in its beginnings, external to the part of the

Ministry that was doing the day-to-day work of trading in controlled foods and administering the rationing system; many of its members were inexperienced in such matters, unable to rebut the taunt that they were theorists. Although, therefore, the minority within the Ministry who had always striven to look ahead and make plans before the event had, by the beginning of 1941, been considerably reinforced in numbers and prestige, they were still, one might perhaps say, a concentrated faction rather than a diffused and effective influence on every aspect of food control.

The Ministry's response, therefore, to the new and difficult conditions of the winter of 1940/41 was not all of a piece. On the one hand, the influence of the "radicals" in the new Department came out in the abortive campaign for compulsory slaughter and the setting up of the marketing company for carrots and onions; more important, they took a leading part in formulating the general policy of price stabilization, eventually announced in the budget speech of April 1941. On the other hand, not only were the former proposals faced with strong opposition within the Ministry itself—opposition that in the end was justified by events—but there was even stronger resistance to a general extension of the scope of control, undertaken, so to speak, on principle. The new measures that were taken to regulate supplies of milk and eggs and the price of fish might seem at first sight to contradict this assertion. But, in truth, the Ministry was driven to take them; the first by reason of acute and inescapable shortage, the others mainly at Treasury insistence that the cost-of-living index must not be allowed to rise. Moreover, their initial results might seem to justify the advocates of caution. It was not that these shrank from bold and drastic action if it were proved to be necessary; it was rather that they were rightly conscious of the administrative difficulties and unwilling to jeopardize the Ministry's reputation. The conflict of view comes out most clearly in the prolonged debates, lasting over the greater part of 1941, that eventually resulted in the introduction of "points rationing," on December 1. From then on, one may say, the old guard of food control were on the defensive; even so they managed to mold the new system closely to the old.

Why, in face of the manifest success of food rationing, should those most nearly responsible for it be so hot against its extension? Shortly, because they realized that it could not be extended without altering its character, and they believed that to do so would make it unworkable. The rationing system, as the public saw, was simple

and effective in checking the evils of maldistribution; nothing could be more natural than that, when cake, sausages, or even fish became scarce, people should clamor for them to be rationed. But the public saw only the small part of the iceberg that was above water. In order that the predetermined quantity of rationed food—that much and no more—should each week be awaiting the customer in the shop of his choice, an intricate mechanism, constantly in need of lubrication and minor repair, had been brought into being. No sooner had rationing started in 1940 than the Ministry had been constrained to introduce the first of a series of simplifications, designed to relieve the burden of paper work both on traders and local food offices. By the time rationing had been in force a year, it had been decided that the retailer might cancel coupons instead of cutting them out and forwarding them to the local food office; he had no longer to complete a periodical form of application for supplies, required originally every month¹ and latterly every six months; the separate returns of stock, sales, and purchases, required from him monthly for each rationed food, were combined on a single form. After July 1941 ration books were to be current for a year instead of six months, and in January of that year the general reregistration of consumers with retailers that accompanied each fresh ration book issue was abandoned. (This proved to be a mistake; periodic reregistration was the only means of keeping the food office records reasonably up to date, and the Ministry only dispensed with it on one subsequent occasion.)

There remained, however, plenty of work for local food offices to do. The mere existence of the consumer-retailer tie meant that they came into action every time a consumer moved outside shopping range of his present retailer. He would then have to notify his "new" food office, which would provide him with fresh counterfoils to give to fresh retailers, who in turn would pass them back to the food office. Meantime the "old" food office would have to be informed so that it might cancel his former registrations and destroy the old counterfoils. (If, as often happened, he shopped outside the food office area in which he lived, a third and even a fourth office might be brought in; the national registration offices had also to be informed in all cases.) Food offices had to file every counterfoil

¹ This requirement had arisen out of a misunderstanding by the Food (Defence Plans) Department of procedure in the first Ministry of Food, whereby, a "once and for all" form intended for use at the initiation of a rationing scheme had been turned into a periodic, albeit superfluous, return.

lodged with them, and maintain a sort of ledger account of the fluctuations of each retailer's registrations. Every eight weeks (four weeks at first) they had to compute and issue fresh buying permits for each rationed food; they might also have to issue, between whiles, supplementary permits to those retailers and caterers who could make out a case for extra supplies. They had to check the four-week returns, already mentioned, for internal consistency and correspondence with previous returns, and take the evidence so furnished into account when preparing permits.

Beyond the basic work on changes of address that remained constant however many foods were rationed, all these jobs multiplied in exact ratio to the number of foods for which counterfoils and permits were required. Like all food office work, they were made arduous by the need to deal with everybody—including the illiterate and incompetent. The Ministry soon discovered that it was useless to ask the public to fill up forms; the food office staff had to do that, from what information it could elicit over the counter. A whole new technique, alien to the older type of Government office, had to be worked out for this purpose; and in 1940–41 the Ministry had hardly begun to undertake this, its part in an administrative revolution of the war years.

Apart from the impossible burden that the extension of rationing in its existing form to many more foods would be, officials saw another objection to it. Rationing implied a guaranty of supply, which, even for some foods already under a greater or less degree of Ministry control, was incapable of fulfillment; it therefore could not be applied, in its strict form, to fresh fish, eggs, or milk, though the Ministry for a month or two went so far as to toy with rationing milk. Nor was it suitable for minor but important foods, like pickles and sauces, that are bought at relatively infrequent or irregular intervals in small quantities, or that are consumed in greatly varying quantities by different individuals or households. A uniform ration of one-third of an ounce of mixed pickles every seven weeks would clearly be derisory; yet the maldistribution of such things as these was a source of constant public complaint, to which, in the matter of onions, the Ministry actually gave way.

During the greater part of 1941, food officials wrestled valiantly but vainly with this problem of maldistribution of minor necessities. They tried, for instance, a scheme for jam and other "spreads," under which the Ministry undertook to allocate supplies by means of consumer registration, but guaranteed only a "minimum share" to

each person. This was voluntary rationing in a new guise, and such was the scramble for the marginal supplies that the Ministry was shortly constrained to convert it into a normal rationing scheme, based however on a four-week period. They decided to set up, alongside the normal channels of distribution, *unrationed food depots* of nonperishable foods that could be drawn upon to relieve local shortages, arising out of the shifts of population that had made obsolete the allocation of supplies in terms of an earlier *datum* period. But their chief proposal, only made under heavy pressure from Lord Woolton's Ministerial colleagues, was the rationing of a limited number of foods by groups, for each of which the consumer would be tied to a retailer. He would be entitled to purchase, in each ration period, a guaranteed quantity of some food included in each of the following categories: canned meat, fish, etc.; dried fruits; pulses; biscuits; oatmeal and other breakfast foods; rice, sago, macaroni, etc.

Group rationing did not commend itself to Ministers, mainly because compared with its successful rival, points rationing, it appeared to mean excessive regimentation of the consumer. Certain aspects of the Ministry's plans therefore remain to this day obscure: how retailers' permits were to be drawn up; what quantity of, say, canned salmon was to be equivalent to the ration in canned luncheon meat; how retailers were to be prevented from showing favor to certain customers in respect of the more desirable items; what the effect would be on traders who were accustomed to stock only a part of the range included in each group. The scheme is interesting, therefore, merely as a *reductio ad absurdum* of the purely administrative attitude to rationing, which because it thought, not of coupons as a form of currency, but of the counterfoil as conferring an entitlement to a fixed quantity at a fixed place, could not hit on the obvious solution to the problem of allocation, namely, to fix different coupon prices for different foods in accordance with demand. It was not that this—the salient feature of points rationing—was new; it had been considered and rejected, though in very different circumstances, in 1917/18. In those, the pioneer days of British rationing, everything had been so fluid that schemes on widely differing principles might at least be mooted; by 1941, so strongly had the registration system taken root that it had choked even the memory that some other might be possible. Points rationing came, not as a rediscovery in the Ministry of Food, but from Germany, the enemy, via the academic economists recruited to the Cabinet secretariat.

EXPENDITURE RATIONING ADVOCATED

At the opposite pole from the piecemeal measures being worked out in the Ministry of Food were a variety of proposals for rationing the money outlay of consumers, by means of coupons that must be surrendered to the value of each purchase. These were much canvassed during the early months of 1941 among professional economists, both inside and outside Government service, as an anti-inflation measure that would preserve consumers' choice. In the Ministry of Food, however, they cut little ice. Lord Woolton himself refused to have anything to do with them; and it is easy to guess the blistering reception they would have had from the Prime Minister. As expenditure rationing appears still to enjoy a certain academic vogue, at any rate in the United States (2), it may be worth while to indicate some of the administrative objections to it—objections that might have been more clearly formulated at the time, had it been taken more seriously.

The first of these—perhaps in itself sufficient—lies in the violent and unforeseeable effects that expenditure rationing would have on the pattern of demand, particularly if it were introduced, as surely it would have to be introduced, secretly and overnight. War requires that the Government take more and more direct control over economic affairs; and it will, at any rate in a democratic state, seek to do this gradually and with as little disturbance as possible. Rationing and price control of the conventional kind are means to this end; the latter in particular endeavors to prevent the peacetime price structure from changing too rapidly, and is, in fact, inevitably based on that structure as a norm. While it is not impossible that controlled prices should be used by the State as a means of directing economic activity, they are more often a sign that this function of the price mechanism is in abeyance, having been replaced by some system of rationing or allocation. Expenditure rationing would immediately replace this gradual development by confusion; it would remove the firm ground of precedent on which all administrators must tread, and from which the boldest experiment must start.

This objection loses but little of its force if it be assumed that the scope of expenditure rationing is limited, say to nonessential foods. It may be legitimate and necessary in wartime for the Government to control the price of, say, smoked salmon, after discussion and negotiation, or even without these preliminaries if need arise and the information is available on which action must be based. But a Government that introduced without warning an Order that

might, for all it knew, render the legitimate trade of salmon smoking wholly unprofitable would very properly be condemned for gambling with the citizen's livelihood. Again, an over-all limit to spending could not be applied to such foods as fish, fruit, and vegetables, because of the catastrophic effect it would have on prices in the event of local and temporary gluts.

Apart from these general arguments, the mechanism of the schemes needs more thought than, for instance, Mr. Kalecki, the most prominent of their advocates, appears to have given to it (3). His scheme proposed that retailers should exchange the value coupons they received for others valid at wholesale, which in turn should be surrendered by wholesalers to the State. But this neglects the problem of the supply of goods at first hand and particularly of raw materials to the manufacturer. How much fat, flour, and sugar go to the equivalent at first hand of two shillings' worth of slab cake? How much of such an allocation, supposing it to be computed correctly, might be diverted by the recipient to some cake substitute outside the expenditure rationing scheme? Again, how is one to make sure that coupons are canceled and not re-used—to say nothing of theft and forgery? The temptation to malpractice is obviously multiplied when one type of coupon serves for many commodities.

In short, the expenditure ration is to be condemned because it is both arbitrary and uncertain in its effects. The State imposes an obligation on the citizen, but offers him nothing definite in return. This is indefensible in principle; experience shows that it would be resented in practice. Again and again the Ministry of Food found that the public held it morally responsible for the supply, not only of the principal foods, but of minor foods that might, from the point of view of nutrition, be quite insignificant. For any such foods that were included in an expenditure ration, the responsibility would be no less burdensome because it was impossible to discharge.

POINTS RATIONING INTRODUCED

Points rationing, as first propounded by the Cabinet Office economists and applied by the Board of Trade to clothing in June 1941, was a compromise between the administrative innocence of expenditure rationing and the administrative rigidity of the existing food system. To all but a tiny minority in the Ministry of Food, however, it was more dangerous, because more plausible, than expenditure rationing. The commodity directors disliked it because,

unlike schemes with registration, it appeared to offer no firm basis for forward allocations of individual foodstuffs and hence, they feared, no protection for their stocks. Rationing administrators looked askance at the prospect of millions of fresh bits of paper inundating food offices, in place of the ordinary coupons whose collection had just been abandoned. However, as somebody pointed out, rationing 45 million people is bound to mean a lot of paper. Others feared delays in the shops while coupons were cut out. All disliked the freedom given to both customer and retailer to look for supplies where they pleased; it would "upset" distribution and cause waste of transport.

For months the argument raged between economists and "practical men"; and it might have gone on longer but for two influences. One was the need to secure fair distribution for the new foods, particularly canned meat and fish, that were about to come in from the United States under Lend-Lease; the other was the importunity of Lord Woolton's Ministerial colleagues and his own willingness to be convinced that points rationing, notwithstanding the misgivings of his own officials, was worth a trial. Moreover, by this time, September 1941, it had become clear that points rationing of clothes was acceptable and reasonably successful.

It was, however, an anxious and mistrustful Ministry of Food that set about preparing the new scheme, to launch which was indeed an ambitious operation. Devising a supplementary ration book was the least part of it—child's play to the ingenious staff of the Ministry's Rationing Division. (It consisted simply of three sets of coupons for each of thirteen four-week periods; the sets were lettered A, B, and C, and the Ministry varied the value in points of each or all as required.) Distributing the book too turned out to be relatively simple, although the Ministry tried unsuccessfully to enlist both post offices and schools as agents before turning to its own local offices; people were simply told to present their main ration books, which would be rubber-stamped to show that a supplementary book had been issued. The main effort lay on the commodity side; since his ability to replace his stock would depend on his sales, each retailer must be given a proper share of "points foods" before the scheme opened. Fortunately, there was virtually no problem of traders' existing stocks, since the foods to be included in the scheme were either entirely new to the United Kingdom market or so scarce that stocks had been used up. The Ministry therefore took registrations for rationed foods as a general basis for its initial alloca-

tions (except for canned fish, where past performance was thought more appropriate).

In accordance with its usual practice, the Ministry set up *ad hoc* trade bodies, representing canners of beans and importers of canned meat respectively, to organize the distribution of these foods. The formation of these bodies took rather longer than it had planned; so did the actual movement of the goods into the shops. The latter delay arose because the goods had been stored largely in what the Ministry called its "buffer depots"—premises that had been taken over from other uses in order to provide dispersed storage as a precaution against air attack. These improvised stores were often in isolated places and the rate at which goods could be handled in and out of them was limited. Hence, when the deadline—November 17, 1941—approached, the Ministry was inundated by complaints from retailers that they had no supplies and the scheme had to be postponed for a fortnight.

This might at first sight seem a trivial matter; and the instant success the scheme—or perhaps one should say the new variety of foods included in it—scored with the public made it seem so in retrospect to the Ministry. At the time, however, there were dark hints of sabotage that were only dispelled by a special inquiry, undertaken at the Minister's request. The Ministry, it must be remembered, was not overpopular in December 1941; it had lost face over eggs and onions, though for the former, at any rate, it could not be blamed, and it badly needed a fillip of approval. Moreover, there was an aspect of the scheme's popular success that could not last; the initial schedule of points prices, necessarily drawn up in the dark, had set such sought-after items as canned red salmon far too low. Further, the attack on Pearl Harbor led to the hasty inclusion of other items in the list without a commensurate increase in the number of points allotted to each customer. In January 1942, dried fruits and pulses were added; in February, canned fruit, canned tomatoes, and canned peas; in April, breakfast cereals (except oatmeal) and condensed milk; in August, biscuits.

Once the scheme was launched, its sponsors, the economists, had retired into the background; and the all-important function of adjusting supplies to demand by means of points prices had been left to rule of thumb, exercised by people who, if they themselves were not apprehensive, were influenced by trade directors who most certainly were. Moreover, it was not generally understood that the working of the scheme would be completely upset if the Ministry

were not prepared to meet all demands for any particular food at the points price it itself had fixed. There would, too, be loud cries of complaint from the trade and public if the Ministry altered points prices too often, or indeed at any other time except at the beginning of the four-week period for which points coupons were valid.

In due time the retailers' orders for the all-too-popular kinds of canned meat and fish found their way up to the respective commodity divisions. Alarmed for their stocks, the divisions decided that they would continue to allocate no more than the datum quantities; which meant, of course, that wholesalers had at their disposal points-purchasing power that they could not use as they wished. What were they to do with it? Their retail customers would not thank them for further quantities of pink salmon—which the Ministry had mistakenly "up-pointed" along with the red—or canned beans in gravy. Dried pulses, even at a nominal points value, were never popular with the British public. The Ministry's Dried Fruit Division was the first to discover what was the wholesalers' solution; it was swamped with points vouchers, not, be it noted, from specialist wholesalers, but from general wholesalers, and in its turn it was forced to revert to datum allocations. Whereas, that is to say, customers, and hence retailers, were clamoring for canned meat and fish, their wholesalers were being forced to translate this clamor into a demand for dried fruit *faute de mieux*.

The solution seems simple, if one looks at the points scheme as a whole: raise the points value of the popular lines until equilibrium is reached. But only the Director of Dried Fruit saw this, and his argument appears to have been brushed aside as special pleading. Instead, it was decided that these disquieting symptoms were those of a general inflation of points currency. How such an inflation could arise in a closed system has never been satisfactorily explained. But, given the predilections of both commodity divisions and rationing administrators, the remedy could be arrived at without diagnosis—namely, that distribution could not be regulated merely by manipulating points prices and thereafter allowing traders to order what they pleased. Such freedom was dangerous. Henceforward the Ministry was to fix, period by period, the tonnage and variety of points goods to be released, equating it exactly with the number of points available to the public. It would, of course, still be open to the retailer to exercise discretion in his orders; but there would be no guaranty that he would get the varieties of goods that he asked for; indeed, it was certain that he would not.

Still less would the consumer, for all that he could tender the points value of a can of salmon, be able to call for it on demand. The honeymoon period of points rationing was over; it was not long before the Ministry conceded that a retailer might reserve scarce points goods for his registered customers. "Scarce points goods"—the phrase ought to have been regarded as a contradiction in terms; its acceptance as a sort of norm was a confession of defeat. But then the Ministry of Food had always been defeatist about the scheme's essential principle; the public was too inured by now to queues and under-the-counter sales to feel cheated when they reappeared for points goods. For even with all these imperfections, points rationing was a great deal better than nothing. It did impose a very severe limit on the ability of the wealthy and the leisured to grab too many of the semiluxuries that helped to make life tolerable in wartime Britain.

THE POINTS-COUPON BANKING SCHEME

Fear of "points inflation" was the original motive force behind the one major change in the administrative arrangements for points rationing—the introduction of a coupon banking system. It had, however, been rather overlaid by others by the time the change was made, in September 1943. Originally, the retailer had exchanged his points coupons at the local food office for vouchers representing 100, 1,000, and 10,000 points. He then had to send to his wholesaler vouchers to the value of each order, with the order, i.e., pay points in cash; and this cash system was repeated higher up the distributive chain, until the vouchers were finally "killed" by the Ministry or its agents. The system was simple and above all automatic; it took care immediately and without fuss of certain difficulties—population movements, for instance. Nevertheless, officials were uneasy about it. Vouchers, unlike points, were of indefinite validity; it was feared that retailers might hoard them until some especially attractive food came along and then scoop the pool; multiple stores, with their buying power concentrated at a headquarters office, were particularly suspect. The writer has seen no evidence that this fear was, or could have been, realized in practice; it would appear to require much greater reserve stocks of points foods than any retailer possessed. A more serious fear, though it seems equally unrealized in practice, was the possibility that the vouchers might be forged.

These fears and suspicions were fed on the one hand by the dried-fruit imbroglio and on the other by the Ministry's absolute

ignorance of what traders were actually doing with their vouchers, and at times were clearly contradictory; for instance, traders could not be accused of hoarding vouchers when they were all apparently clamoring for dried fruit, and they would be unwise to do so at a time when the general trend of points prices was clearly and unmistakably upward. To set its own mind at rest, however, the Ministry began to work out a banking system under which every trader would deposit his points at the food office, and all his transactions thereafter would be recorded and checked. The devising of such a system, which would obviously have to be agreed on in advance with the trade, proved to be lengthy; and in the end the Ministry "sold" it to retailers by arguments that in effect turned inside out those by which officials had persuaded themselves that a change in procedure was necessary.

By the time points rationing had been running a year, at the beginning of 1943, there had developed a persistent cry from retailers that they had "not enough points" to maintain their stocks. How far this can be construed to indicate excessive rigidity in the voucher system is difficult to say, because we do not know how far the development of informal credit arrangements offset the inflexibility of official regulations. As under straight rationing, strict "working to rule" would probably have brought distribution to a stop; there can have been few wholesalers who, on occasion, did not break the strict letter of the law and send supplies forward before vouchers, or even the order itself, should have reached them. But it is at least possible that the shortage of points was imaginary, the result of an attempt by retailers to maintain the same *quantity* in stock of the more desirable foods as they had had at the opening of the scheme—a vain attempt, because the points price of many such items had been raised and new items brought under the scheme, without a corresponding increase in the total points entitlement for each consumer. In other words, it was a shortage of the foods people most wanted, not of currency, that was the real source of grievance. However that may be, retailers willingly accepted points banking in the belief that it would end the points shortage.

The points-banking scheme began in September 1943, after a rudimentary form of it had been tried and proved successful for "personal-points" (chocolate and sugar confectionery) coupons. Each retailer had an account at the local food office, replenished by paying in his coupon takings for each four-week period. He might order from his suppliers in each period points goods to the value of

his credit balance at the bank. At the time the order was dispatched, the wholesaler would send the retailer a "points invoice" on a prescribed form, which the retailer would present to his food office for payment to the "wholesaler's" account at the *Divisional* Food Office. As against vouchers, the new arrangement had the advantage, for the retailer, that he never had points immobilized because his wholesaler was temporarily out of the goods he wanted; there was no problem of "small change," because all accounts were made up to a precise points value; and there was no danger of loss or theft of vouchers. The gain to the Ministry was greater awareness of the position of each retailer, and greater opportunity for conscious control. But as at the beginning of points rationing, the first few months of points banking were marred by miscalculations that could readily have been avoided, had its first principles been more clearly understood and set out.

Because, probably, of the pressure of other work on food office staffs, it had been decided that each stage in a points-banking transaction must take place, not almost simultaneously as in an ordinary banking account, but at intervals of four weeks, corresponding to the validity of the points coupons. This meant that points standing to the credit of a retailer, against which he was placing his orders, would not be paid over to the wholesaler until four weeks after the points invoice had been sent in, and could not be lodged in the wholesaler's account, and become available for his orders, until a further four weeks had elapsed. This delay in settlement was of little importance once the scheme was working. But at the beginning, when the change from voucher cash to banking credit was being made, it left a gap of eight weeks during which no points would be reaching wholesalers or multiple stores' central buying offices.

Officials saw that that gap would need to be bridged by providing these traders with an initial trading allowance of points; but they failed to distinguish between this and any credit that might need to be given to traders in the form of an addition to the amount of their points turnover, in order to secure the free movement of goods. They also believed that credit of this latter sort, which they proposed to give to retailers, wholesalers, and the central buying offices of chain stores, need not be given to the latter's retail branches. They overlooked, that is to say, the fact that credit given at the retail stage eventually finds its way up the distributive chain. Moreover, they based both trading allowance and extra credit (lumped together as "starting credit") on a trader's performance during the first three

ration periods of 1943. This in itself would penalize a business that had been expanding since that time.

This effect was masked, in the case of independent retailers and their wholesale suppliers, by the grant of three weeks' extra points in the former's starting credit. Multiple head offices had to do without this; they only got the week's points over the bare eight weeks' requirements, that had also been given to wholesalers.

There was, that is to say, as a result of points banking, an unintentional squeeze of the points assets of "multiples." In many cases, they were able to meet this by reducing their stocks; in some, they resorted to overdrawing their accounts—an offense that at times became so common as almost to justify itself as unavoidable. Many, no doubt, reconciled themselves to a permanent fall in points turnover. So many were the complaints of inadequate points accounts, and not only from multiples, that the Ministry established a system of refresher grants whereby it undertook to make good any deficiencies in a trader's account below a minimum of so many weeks' turnover in stock and points combined. Here again multiples got worse terms; and it is the more significant, therefore, that over half of them qualified for the refresher grant between June 1944 and April 1945, as against only one-eighth of the independent retailers.

The fact of unconscious bias is important, because it accounts for a phenomenon that the Ministry noted but could never convincingly explain—the lower proportion of points trade done by multiples and co-operative stores, compared with their registrations under "straight" rationing. It also explains the constant agitation on the part of these traders for allocation of the more sought-after points foods according to registrations, an agitation to which the postwar Ministry eventually yielded, in 1948. But it contains a more important lesson for economic administrators, namely, that a scheme can be too complicated for those who have to run it. The struggles of the Ministry to explain and justify the points-banking system to exasperated and not always obtuse traders are those of an intellectual *Laocoön*. Even those rare officials who understood and strove to mend it were hampered by the need to defend the errors of their predecessors, perhaps most of all by the concessions the latter had made to importunate trade pressure groups. As for these, they found points banking something of a disappointment. One of its unforeseen disadvantages, from their point of view, was that it seemed to limit the retailer's ability to expand his business to meet extra demand, as from the return of air-raid refugees; and they were much

aggrieved by the Ministry's prosecutions for overdrawing points accounts. (These were generally taken only against serious or persistent offenders; even so, magistrates generally regarded the crime as a technical one, to be let off with a nominal fine.) There was even a certain nostalgia among grocers for vouchers; some efficient traders, and particularly multiples, had been accustomed to exchange points for vouchers at more frequent intervals than every four weeks, and so been enabled to increase their turnover of points goods. Whether this would have still been possible, given the transport delays of the later years of war, is perhaps doubtful.

PROBLEMS OF POINTS RATIONING

The machinery of points rationing as a whole, like that of points banking, worked with a great number of groans and creaks. But work it did, for eight and a half years; it was not abolished until April 1950. As most Ministry officials, at the time it was started, had never expected it to work at all, it is hardly surprising that they should look on it as a considerable administrative achievement. A cynical observer, on the contrary, might say that only an extraordinarily healthy child could have survived such an upbringing. Certainly, if one is to appraise the value of the system as such, one must realize the handicaps under which it was introduced. Everything about it—consumer's and retailer's freedom of choice and of supplier, the need for constant variation of points values, the unaccountable voucher, the management of the flow of goods from the consumer's end—was alien to the tradition of food control in the United Kingdom; the tradition of the all but functionless coupon, the supply of fixed quantities against permits, or in relation to datum performance without rationing. From the very first it was subject to the pressure of convention; allocation of dried fruit was, as early as 1943, related to retailers' sugar registrations; the datum allocations of canned meat, fish, and biscuits continued; points price schedules were simplified by grouping many varieties, e.g., of canned fish, at the same level, and were varied so seldom that they too became almost conventional.

Efforts, more particularly after the war had ended, to restore something like a buyers' market in points foods, and, by raising points prices where necessary, to force firsthand distributors in particular to abandon datum allocations were successful enough to show that the thing could be done, but also encountered much opposition in the trade. The extension in 1948 of the dried fruit "unit voucher"

system to canned meat, milk, fruit, and fish was by contrast popular with traders but at variance with the scheme's basic principles. It marked the closest point of assimilation between straight and points rationing systems; and that it should occur at a time when officials' understanding of the requirements of a successful points system was far greater than it had been in 1942/43, measures the strength of the forces making for rigidity. That strength, however, had been nourished by years of Ministry acquiescence and even encouragement.

Questions of trade psychology and administrative mastery apart, could the system have been made to work in the semiautomatic fashion that its sponsors hoped, and the coupon been made to draw the right goods, so to speak, to the consumer? The answer turns, of course, mainly on the Ministry's ability to set the correct points prices—in practice, on its ability to raise those of the foods in greatest demand to a level at which unrestricted release would be possible. (It must be remembered that there was no possibility, in the short run, of increasing the supply of most points foods, which was governed by a number of factors outside the Ministry's control.) There is no question that, for long periods, canned red salmon, condensed milk, and sweet biscuits were underpriced in points and went either by retailers' favor or on the principle of first come, first served. The Ministry contended that it was impossible to force points prices up to an equilibrium level in these instances; biscuits were perishable and might be wasted if they were pointed too high; a pound of canned red salmon already took 32 points, as against the normal 20 per month allowed to each individual consumer; the shortage of fresh milk bore particularly on people living alone, who ought therefore not to be forced to use up too many of their scanty points on condensed milk.

The case of biscuits really only illustrates the disadvantage of making the points unit-of-account so large, in the interests of simplicity. If, instead of 20 points per period, the consumer had had 80 to 100, proportionately reduced in value, much finer adjustments of points prices would have been possible. As it was, the Ministry could not vary the points price of a pound of biscuits by less than 4 points each way, if the purchaser of a quarter pound was to be able to tender an exact number of points for it. If 8 points a pound was too low, 12 might well be too high; and biscuit queues were perhaps a lesser evil than the recasting of the whole system of coupon values. But the arguments in favor of underpricing canned red salmon and canned milk amount to little more than pretending there was not a

shortage of these and hoping the public would not notice it. It was not even as if the hard cases, in whose name the Ministry was willing to condone a breach of points logic, could even be sure of benefiting from its action. For what did that action mean? It meant not only that some people, who might have been willing to pay a higher points price in order to be sure of getting these scarce items, might have to forego them in favor of some others who could curry favor with the retailer, but that some other item or items must have been *overpriced* in points, to the disadvantage of another set of consumers to whom the Ministry owed equal consideration. Moreover (and this was a point habitually overlooked) the proper adjustment of these prices might have eased the problem presented by biscuits.

The problem of varying regional preferences, under a system of national points prices, was more genuinely tricky. It can indeed be argued that the demand for canned salmon in northwest England, described by the Ministry as out of all proportion to that in the rest of the country, was the reflection of its unduly low national points price; and that if the points price were sufficiently high to equate demand with supply, there could be no objection to most of the fish going to the northwest. The alternative—allocation more or less on a regional basis—amounts to saying that certain consumers willing to pay the points price shall not have canned salmon, simply because they live in the northwest, a less obvious but equally unfair form of discrimination. In this case, the only impediment to a solution was attachment to the datum principle. For some other points foods, such as biscuits and breakfast cereals, the problems arose from another part of the Ministry's policy—its attempt to save transport by limiting the area within which a certain manufacturer's goods might be distributed. The principle on which these zoning schemes were drawn up was to assume equal shares per head of population, which, given the information at the Ministry's disposal, was unavoidable. But apart from regional preferences in types of food—there was a chronic unsatisfied demand for syrup and treacle (molasses) in East Anglia, for instance—the problem of brands arose. Some breakfast foods went "under the counter"; others, inferior perhaps, perhaps less advertised, could not be sold in a limited area of distribution and had to be given special dispensations from the zoning scheme. Short of fixing separate points values for each brand—an invidious and perhaps impracticable solution—there was nothing that the administrators of points rationing could do to help.

That there were inescapable causes of friction in the machinery

of points rationing, that would in any case have required administrative intervention to remove, almost goes without saying. But that variation of points prices must inevitably have been discarded as the main motive force of the scheme is much more doubtful. It was the climate of restriction, with its forms, permits, allocations, and maximum prices, into which the scheme was born, rather than the inherent tendency to inflation, that officials at the time and some writers later (*4*) professed to discover in it, that brought about its ossification. So too, as it seems to the writer, some of the ingenious manipulations of traders' points capital under the banking scheme arose as much from the opportunity as from the need to act. It seems doubtful, for instance, whether anything was gained by writing their accounts up or down in proportion to changes in the total points entitlement of consumers. No such adjustments were necessary or possible under the voucher scheme, and it is improbable that the time lag in the transmission of the changes up and down the banking system would have produced any serious disturbance. Again, the method of assessing traders' points capital by taking into account the whole points value of their stock appears to have led to an exaggeration of the degree of credit, and hence of the danger of inflation, in the system. For since at any given moment a proportion of that stock was *ex hypothesi* overpriced in points, it would remain frozen until the Ministry reduced its points value. Reflection, indeed, suggests that there must have been a continuous decline in traders' purchasing power from this cause, and that their constant complaints had more foundation than the Ministry was willing to admit.

These remarks make no claim to do duty for a complete analysis of the economic problems of points rationing, which would take much more space than can be allowed for the subject in the present study. They will, however, have served their purpose if they put the reader on guard against two opposite dangers: the first, of constructing intricate hypotheses that have no relation to the ascertained facts; the second, of inferring lessons of wide validity, and "inevitable trends," from an experience more than usually scattered with errors and miscalculations.

"MANUFACTURED FOODS," "CONCENTRATION," AND
TRANSPORT ECONOMY

The very fact that points rationing, so far from being used as a substitute for more elaborate and detailed control of supply, was made part of such a control, in a sense reinforces the significance of

its adoption by the Ministry of Food. For it meant that the Ministry no longer recoiled from an attempt at universality; was in fact prepared to use the new technique, once it was sure of being able to manage it, on problems that had hitherto seemed insoluble or not worth solution. In the first flush of enthusiasm all sorts of foods, from coffee and cocoa, cakes, and salad oil, to kippers, beer, and (oddly enough) household crockery, were put forward as candidates for points rationing, and only the firmness of the Minister himself against unnecessary restrictions prevented at any rate the first two of these from being added to it.

In the winter of 1942/43 an ingenious plan was evolved for putting restaurant meals indirectly "on points," but never adopted—fortunately, as it would have dangerously unbalanced the points scheme, just as the bread coupons/points exchange scheme did when bread rationing was introduced in 1946. This zeal for controlling everything, though it owes much to the grim import situation after Pearl Harbor, is not altogether explained by it; there was something more imponderable at work to change the tentative controllers of, say mid-1941, to the confident, perhaps overconfident controllers of mid-1942. A feeling of mastery in such matters sometimes comes, no doubt, as suddenly and unexpectedly as, say, the ability to ride a bicycle; but there can be little doubt that the popular success of points rationing was the turning point in the Ministry's career, after which it felt it could do nothing wrong.

Points rationing was significant, too, in another way. The pressure for its introduction had derived not from the necessities of food policy, as the Ministry of Food conceived them, but from those concerned with war-economic policy as a whole, the policy which, under the aegis of the Lord President's Committee of the War Cabinet was, during 1941, beginning to acquire shape and completeness (5, pp. 220–21). In point of time, this process coincides with the spread of the war first to Russia and then to the Far East; it coincides also with the enlistment of the last remaining idle economic resources in the United Kingdom war effort. If that effort were to be increased further—to become commensurate with the size of the task ahead and with what was, though mistakenly, believed to be the much greater effort, relative to his resources, of the enemy—there must be a planned transfer of factors of production away from inessential uses.

The Ministry of Food had to reckon, that is, not only with a shortage of food, but with demands that it reduce the claims of food

on labor, transport, and "ancillary materials" such as timber, cardboard, and paper. The time had gone past, for instance, when the manpower authorities would give blanket exemptions to men above a certain age employed in a food industry, or the transport authorities ignore long- and cross-haulage of even essential foods by rail or road. Each worker, and each journey almost, must pass a test applied, not by the Ministry of Food, but by the Ministries of Labour and War Transport, respectively. If, therefore, a rational food policy was to continue to be carried out, the Ministry of Food must interest itself actively in these matters, and must in especial be prepared to offer expert guidance to its fellow Departments. It must be willing and able to say not merely that, for example, the canning of Cornish pilchards was an essential industry, but that the lorry driver employed by a particular cannery must not be drafted into the Army unless and until a replacement could be provided. It must justify the continued transport of stout from London to Glasgow by special tank waggons.

Now these obligations—imposed not merely by the pressure of other agencies but by the Minister's acceptance, as a member of the Government, of the policies in principle—were primarily obligations to find out facts that had hitherto been ignored. Hitherto the Ministry had had detailed information only about those industries—flour milling, oilseed crushing, sugar refining, for example—that operated under its control and that were manifestly essential. Much of the output of such basic food industries found its way to the consumer in the form of "manufactured foods" in great variety, ranging from cake and biscuits to soft drinks and baby foods. Where the ingredients of these things had been subjected to rationing or other statutory limitation of supply, allocation had generally been on the datum principle, i.e., any firm that had used the raw material before the war was allowed a proportion of its prewar usage. Commodity Divisions had made, at the outset of control, some distinction between different classes of foods on grounds of merit; for instance, sugar had been allotted for condensed milk at the rate of 75 percent of datum, for chocolate at 70 percent, for fruit canning at 50 percent, and for mineral waters and candied peel at only 25 percent. But these allocations, though not unreasonable, were arbitrary: they bore no relation to the supplies of other ingredients, controlled or uncontrolled, that the trades in question were able to obtain; and generally speaking, no control was exercised over the nature, quantity, quality, or price of the final product. Thus a manufacturer with more than

one "line" might switch his supplies of sugar from one to the other as his interest dictated. Nor had the food authorities any information about the labor employed by such firms, or the pattern of distribution of their products. And this was true even of industries, like brewing, the output of which had been subjected to control as early as January 1940.

Just as the Ministry of Food was driven by the fact of shortage, the pressure of public opinion, or the desire for reform, to make a series of extensions in control over primary foodstuffs such as milk, eggs, cheese, and fish—extensions which though important stopped short of comprehensiveness—so at the same time it made tentative steps to extend control over secondary foods. Jam was rationed in June 1941, and the sugar allocation for it henceforth became related to a planned output figure for the industry (6, No. 815). In October the manufacture of food substitutes, which had become a serious racket as a result of shortages of eggs, milk, and onions, was prohibited except under license (6, No. 1606); shortly afterward, a similar control was extended to starch food powders (6, No. 1742). Although the Ministry was already being urged by its expert advisers to take more general measures of control over manufactured foods, it was still inclined to hold back because of the size of the task. Even when, as a result of the Government's more stringent manpower policy, and the adoption of the principle of the "concentration of industry," about which more will be said in a moment, the Ministry was constrained to ask secondary food manufacturers to make returns of their output and labor, it stopped short of a complete inquiry which would comprise all manufacturers not already licensed and should extend to the ingredients they used. That was not to come until September 1942; and although the Ministry had adopted what it called "target" output figures for a number of such foods as early as March 1942, it was not until nearly a year later that it resolved on a standard procedure for allocating ingredients, and later still before the structure of control was completed and the allocation of raw material made conditional on its use in a specified final product. Something like two years elapsed, that is to say, between acceptance of the principle of complete control and its translation into fact.

The same time lag applies to the concomitant measures of concentration of industry and transport economy, to which the Ministry had been in principle committed since March 1941 and October 1941 respectively, and largely for the same reason—lack of detailed information. It was one thing to assent to a policy, another to carry

it out, often against opposition from the trade. The term "concentration" requires explanation. It was applied, originally by the Board of Trade, to measures designed at once to prevent a wasteful use of resources, e.g., by short-time working, in industries deprived of their full prewar supplies of raw materials, and to protect the weaker firms in such industries from being driven permanently out of business by temporary wartime shortages. Where output in an industry had contracted, the policy proposed that it be *concentrated* in a few nucleus factories, whose raw materials would be guaranteed and their labor protected; the remainder would be closed, with compensation and a guarantee of reinstatement after the war (7).

Whereas, however, the nonfood industries for which the Board of Trade was responsible had already, by 1941, been deprived of much of their raw materials and might therefore be considered "ripe" for concentration, hardly any food industries were in the same position. Either, like oilseed crushing and flour milling, they were working longer shifts than before the war, since output had risen and capacity been reduced by air attack; or they had made good their raw material shortages by using substitutes or "extenders" (of which the cheapest, most plentiful, and most versatile was wheaten flour). Bacon curing, thanks to the fall in the pig population, was perhaps the only industry needing to be concentrated without delay. There were certain others, of which the chief were biscuits, chocolate and sugar confectionery, starch food powders, and soft drinks, that could be made to yield manpower and factory storage space for the war effort, provided a decision was made either to reduce their production or simplify the varieties and types of goods they put out; and there were a large number, employing comparatively little labor, which were scarcely worth while doing anything about except on grounds of equity with the larger.

The policy of concentration had been adopted by the Government *before* the Ministry of Food had studied its application to these industries; and by the end of 1941 the Ministry found itself being held up to obloquy in Whitehall as being behindhand. It had, however, done sufficient spadework to enable it to bring forward, by April 1942, concentration schemes for chocolate and sugar confectionery and biscuits, worked out by the industries concerned. In each case a quota of workers per ton of output was fixed, above which no protection would be given to the firm's labor against military or industrial conscription; the quota was such as to prevent the production of any luxury lines of elaborate packings (which in any event

were made impossible by reason of shortages of paper and board). But—and this is where a departure was made from the strict principles of concentration—factories were not to be closed down entirely unless their whole labor or space were required for war purposes.

Unfortunately, the smooth working of the two schemes was upset by a decision, arising from the shipping shortage and still more, perhaps, from the pressure of the disciples of austerity, to curtail the output of biscuits by half and that of sweets by a quarter. (This was possible without upsetting distribution because the former could be put "on points" and a separate rationing scheme, the so-called "personal points" scheme, had just been introduced for the latter; 8, No. 1481). Fresh concentration schemes had therefore to be superimposed on the old; moreover, interdepartmental controversy arose because the manpower authorities wished to have the factories of certain leading firms, situated in areas where labor was badly needed for munitions, closed down completely without regard to the structure of the industry or the transport economy schemes that the Ministry of Food was proposing to bring into effect. It was well into 1943 before agreement was reached on these matters of principle.

Bacon curing did not present the same difficulties, because the industry had been operating under Government control from the very outbreak of war and the facts about it were known. There was, however, some political trouble on account of the closing, under the concentration scheme, of certain bacon factories belonging to the English and Scottish Co-operative Wholesale Societies, with the result that the consumers' co-operative movement had to surrender more capacity than its "capitalist" rivals and, in one case at least, see the latter re-employing the displaced labor. The Ministry had taken careful steps to ensure that the selection of the factories to be closed could not be reasonably imputed to the operations of sinister interests within it; but the case for choosing these particular factories does not seem to have been overstrong. It rested mainly on their inconvenient situation in relation to pig supplies; and one is not clear whether this ought not to have been outweighed by the efficiency of the factories themselves and the political importance of treating the co-operative movement with evident fairness.

Part of the difficulty officials had in meeting criticism of these concentration arrangements was that both trade and public tended to apply a criterion—namely, that the most efficient factories were those that should continue to operate—that for all its common-sense appeal was not really appropriate. Had the mobility of labor in war-

time Britain been as high as the Government would have liked, and as the devisers of schemes sometimes assumed, things would have been different. But as it was, the authorities, not being able to move the labor to the war plants, or to site war production, at this stage, in places where labor was least scarce, found themselves forced to pick out civilian production for closure or shrinkage largely on the ground of location, or because it employed labor suitable for transfer. When, as sometimes happened, things went wrong and an efficient food factory was closed, only for prompt and obviously more important use *not* to be made of its labor and space, odium was apt to fall, not on the Departments that had called for its closure, but on the Ministry of Food, that was acting on their behalf. The case of Carltona Limited, where such a factory was concentrated out of existence, only to be used subsequently as a store for baby carriages, acquired especial notoriety because the company brought a lawsuit against the Ministers. The suit was unsuccessful, because the judge held that under Defence Regulations the Departments closing the factory did not have to prove that their action was reasonable (9). But it certainly had the effect of making the Ministry of Food even more wary about concentration than it had hitherto been; and it may have made other Departments more willing to accept alternative schemes for economy of labor and factory space that, like those finally adopted for biscuits and chocolate and sugar confectionery, did not call for the wholesale closure of complete factories.

The concentration scheme for soft drinks, on the other hand, not only presented what one may call the classic features of such schemes, namely the designation of "nucleus" factories and the complete closure of others; it was also a scheme for standardizing production into a limited number of varieties, and for economizing transport both by "zoning" deliveries and by increasing the production of concentrated drinks requiring dilution, compared with those consumed straight from the bottle. It was devised and carried out by a wartime association, to which all the manufacturers were obliged to belong as a condition of being licensed by the Ministry. Brand names and makers' labels were completely suppressed, being replaced by code letters (denoting the region) and numbers (the maker). Standard formulae, to be sold at prices controlled at all stages of distribution, were adopted. The scheme was introduced on February 1, 1943, but the closure of factories and the adjustment of production levels were not completed until a year later. The economies resulting may best be gauged from the fact that the profits

made by the industry were many thousands of pounds higher than the Ministry had intended when it fixed the maximum prices, notwithstanding that the "pool" drinks were—thanks to the shortage of fruit and sugar, for which saccharin was largely substituted—anything but attractive.

The amount of labor freed by the soft drinks scheme was, however, very small, perhaps a few hundreds; its principal merit lay in the saving of transport. Indeed, only two industries, chocolate and sugar confectionery and biscuits, which between them accounted for three-quarters of all the labor released from food manufacture during 1942/43, can be said to have justified the administrative effort of concentration; and even in these cases it has to be remembered that the very substantial cuts in raw materials, and the reduction in the number of "lines," that were imposed by the Ministry must themselves have led to considerable releases of labor without the elaborate rearrangement of production that the concentration schemes called for. Certainly none of the other very numerous industries, ranging from soap making to pepper and spice grinding, for which concentration schemes were laboriously devised, were worth the trouble from the point of view of food policy, with one exception—the rationalization of the edible-fat melting industry, undertaken as a venture in control by the Ministry's Oils and Fats Division. This substituted for a chaotic industry, difficult to control and costly in its methods, an efficient monopoly, working in close collaboration with the controlled slaughterhouses that were its main source of raw material. But it was not really a concentration scheme at all, since its criterion was not the release of labor or space, but efficiency and economy in production. Nor was the Division able to repeat this triumph when it turned to *technical* fats.

In general, that is to say, the case for concentration, as it turned out in practice, must rest on the assertion that no price in terms of effort is too high to comb out the last man for national service, or to secure equality of treatment between one industry and another. As to that, it was Lord Woolton who told his officials, in another connection, that the craving for perfection was the besetting sin of Government Departments; certainly it is true that the more zealous a man is in pursuing the public interest, the less likely he may be to recognize the point at which diminishing returns set in.

Far more important to the war effort than concentration were the numerous transport economy schemes for which the Ministry of Food was responsible. Some of these, for instance the white fish

zoning scheme, have been discussed elsewhere in this book. Others, such as the establishment of a pool of insulated railway waggons for the transport of meat, and of a similar pool of tank waggons for oils, arose at a comparatively early stage out of the railway crisis of the winter of 1940/41. The biscuit makers and the manufacturers of chocolate and sugar confectionery had, with official approval and encouragement, set up their own pooled road transport. But these early essays in transport economy, or indeed any savings that the Ministry might make in dealing with the bulk foodstuffs it controlled, fell, in the light of the transport crisis, far short of what was required. One of the earliest results of the merger, in the spring of 1941, of the separate Ministries of Shipping and Transport into a single Ministry of War Transport was a call to get rid of unnecessary movements of goods at all stages of distribution. In pursuit of this end, announced officially on behalf of the whole Government in mid-October, the Ministry of Food issued an Order giving it power to control the movement of any foodstuff owned by any food undertaking in Great Britain to prescribe how far, and by what method of transport, any consignment should travel, and the time or place at which it should be loaded or unloaded (6, No. 1694).

As with concentration, however, the adoption of these drastic powers preceded the detailed study and negotiation without which it would be futile and even dangerous to put them into effect. The principle was clear; the movement of food must be so rearranged as to ensure that each final distributor, be he retailer or caterer, obtained his supplies at the nearest possible source. Zones must be set up, across the boundaries of which movements of food must be reduced to a minimum. But this could only be done without causing chaos to distribution if the authorities had a clear picture of the amount and location of supplies—a picture that would be different for each food to be “zoned.” The Ministry started off by having this picture for only a few commodities, such as home-grown beet sugar, cattle cake (a by-product of the controlled crushing mills), and dried fruit. It could readily gain information for some few others that were well organized, like biscuits. But for a great many it had almost no information at all; and even when that information was gathered, officials must then meet and overcome the numerous and not necessarily ill-founded objections of the trade. In addition, the task of preparing economy schemes had in the first place been entrusted, not to the Ministry’s transport experts, but to commodity directors who could not be expected to be enthusiastic.

During 1942, therefore, progress was slow. The most important measure was the so-called Sector Scheme for wholesalers of groceries and provisions, introduced, after delays caused by trade opposition, in August. This divided the whole country into nine regions; retailers (and caterers) in any region must henceforth draw their supplies from wholesalers within that region, except for cross-boundary journeys of 40 miles or less. This scheme may have eliminated the more spectacular long hauls; but it did nothing to get rid of cross-haulage within “sectors,” some of which were big enough to allow hauls of over 100 miles. In any event, the greater part of wholesale transactions must have been relatively local in character, if only because of transport charges. The most useful part of the scheme was a reform that might have been introduced by itself—the restriction of the *number* of wholesalers from which a retailer might draw his supplies. For certain rationed foods only one wholesaler was henceforth allowed.

More important, and more interesting from the technical point of view since they called for the positive direction instead of the mere restriction of food movements, were the numerous zoning schemes introduced during 1943 and 1944 at the initiative of the Ministry’s Transport Division. Three of them, for biscuits, chocolate and sugar confectionery, and soft drinks, were combined with concentration schemes. That for cereal breakfast foods was really two schemes in one—for “biscuit” and “flake” type respectively—and its complications illustrate the care that was needed to produce a satisfactory scheme. In the first place, different brands enjoyed varying degrees of popularity; and demand fell away in the zones where the less popular brands alone were allowed to be sold, leaving the Ministry with a surplus problem. Second, one well-known product was widely used as a laxative and so great were the complaints of those cut off from it by zoning that the Ministry decided to let it go all over the country. Third, the dividing line between two zones left retailers in one small town (Barnoldswick, in West Yorkshire) prohibited from selling the only type of “biscuit” food their wholesalers in Colne, over the Lancashire border, were allowed to supply; and the Ministry had to make a special arrangement, and issue a special dispensation, in order that retailers and wholesalers might obtain the other product.

Cases where exceptional treatment had to be allowed by license were common in all zoning schemes; as in the example just quoted, they generally arose from the need for control Orders to specify local

government boundaries that were irrelevant to the lines of flow of food distribution. A general exception, however, had to be made in favor of branded foodstuffs made by the English and Scottish Co-operative Wholesale Societies for sale in retail co-operative stores. Had these been included in general zoning schemes, private retailers would have been obliged to sell them; this might have led to political trouble, and moreover, retailers might very well object to building up good will for something that they would not be able to trade in, once the war was over.

Perhaps the most intricate scheme, apart from that for soft drinks, which in some ways it resembled, was that for beer, worked out in collaboration with the Brewers' Society. Here the problem was one of local cross-haulage on a rather large scale, arising from the existence of the "tied house" system whereby most licensed premises obtained their beer from a particular brewer. The country was therefore divided into no fewer than 88 zones, within each of which brewers agreed to exchange deliveries irrespective of the house tie, so as to reduce mileage to a minimum. By this means the average length of haul by road, already as low as fifteen miles, was reduced by one-fifth—not at first sight a spectacular result, but important given the sheer bulk of the traffic, five million tons a year. But (and this is where the questions of policy, rather than of technical possibility, came in to limit the extent to which transport economies were pushed) zoning was not extended to the famous branded beers, produced in such centers as Burton-on-Trent, and habitually sold in other brewers' tied houses. These were allowed to be sent all over the Kingdom without restriction, with the result that about half the ton-mileage of transport accounted for by beer was not subjected to any large-scale economy. The contrast with the complete standardization and pooling of soft drinks is striking. So too the Minister's decision, reiterated many times in spite of official argument and entreaty that standard pool brands of "National Tea" should not be introduced, prevented tea from being made the subject of a transport economy scheme. So great, indeed, was the mutual suspicion of the two leading suppliers of packeted tea that they would not co-operate even in a pooled delivery scheme, but insisted, as one official put it, "on traversing the country, serving every town, village and hamlet in a spirit of implacable competition." Yet even so there were excuses for this conduct in the peculiar and time-honored habits of the trade.

The main reason, however, why transport economy schemes were

not pushed as far as one might have expected from the resolute tone of the original Government announcements was, so to speak, indirectly technical; the task of preparing them was so lengthy that by the time the Ministry was ready to act, the need for them seemed to have passed away. From the middle of 1943 it became progressively more difficult to get decisions in favor of austerity from Ministers, above all, perhaps, from the Prime Minister, who as his recent memoirs show, retained a lively suspicion of bureaucratic encroachment.² Even the railway managers, whose interests were most closely wrapped up with restriction on unnecessary movements, seem to have reverted, once the worst crises were over, toward their habitually sanguine estimate of the capacity of their lines, notwithstanding that successive winters were still marked by a plethora of embargoes on the acceptance of rail traffics. None the less, the contribution made by the ingenious transport experts of the Ministry to the saving of ton-mileage—estimated by them at 30 million ton-miles a year at the peak of the schemes—was of great value to the war effort.

CITATIONS

- 1 Sir William H. Beveridge, *British Food Control* (London, 1928).
- 2 See E. S. Shaw and Lorie Tarshis, "A Program for Economic Mobilization," *American Economic Review*, March 1951, esp. pp. 40 ff.
- 3 M. Kalecki, "General Rationing," reprinted in *Oxford Studies in War Economics* (Oxford, 1947).
- 4 E.g., E. F. Hugh-Jones, "Points as Currency," *Economic Journal* (Royal Econ. Soc., London), March 1950, pp. 162-69.
- 5 W. K. Hancock and M. M. Gowing, *British War Economy* (History of the Second World War, U.K. Civil Series, H.M.S.O., 1949).
- 6 S.R.&O. 1941.
- 7 Board of Trade, *The Concentration of Production* (Command Paper, series Cmd. 6258, H.M.S.O., March 1941; in *Parliamentary Papers*, 1940-41, VIII).
- 8 S.R.&O. 1942.
- 9 The appeal in this case is reported in *All England Law Reports* (1943), Vol. II, pp. 560 ff.
- 10 W. S. Churchill, *The Second World War: IV, The Hinge of Fate* (Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston, 1950).

² In his personal minutes about the transport of flowers by rail (10, p. 935), Mr. Churchill speaks of "this war on the flowers, in which your department is showing an undue relish."

CHAPTER 8

THE WELFARE ELEMENT IN FOOD POLICY

NUTRITION AND FOOD POLICY

British food control, as it came into existence at the outbreak of war, was in no way an instrument for promoting better feeding among the people. Its motive force was not philanthropy, but conservation; it owed its origin to fear of inflation, blockade, and industrial unrest; on the "altar" of the last, wrote Collier, the appointment of the first Food Controller was a "reluctant sacrifice" (1, p. 1). The first and only published Report of the Food (Defence Plans) Department (2) had listed three aspects of food control with which the consumer was "vitally concerned": regular supplies; limitation of prices and profits; and "equality of sacrifice in the event of shortage." As has already been noted, the Department limited the application even of these criteria to the "principal" foods. Moreover, the Government of the day was not prepared to commit itself to a measure—the keeping down of prices by subsidy—that had been resorted to in the last war and that Sir William Beveridge, in his recommendations of 1936, had suggested might be necessary again.

A Ministry of Food, that is to say, was to be formed to procure the main foods, to supervise their distribution, and to control their price so as to prevent "profiteering." It would see that everyone could get a fair share, which in most circumstances was defined as an equal share, of these foods at a fair price—provided he could pay for it. There its responsibility would end; it would not seek to ensure that the whole population was fed adequately by scientific standards; it would not set out, for instance, to prevent rises in price that were consequent upon increases in production costs; it would not undertake to organize measures of communal feeding. Officials saw themselves, not as social innovators, but as conservators, aiming to secure that, so far as possible, the existing system of food distribution functioned under war conditions, and intervening only to save it from collapse. The fact that, moved both by experience of the last war and by vague expectation of the next, they planned to intervene promptly and drastically, though by agreement with the trade, did not alter the essential conservatism of their attitude.

It was in their practice, and not their theory, that they went far beyond the expectations of their political masters, and hence suffered so stormy a passage in the first few months of war.

It so happened, however, that the years of preparation for war coincided with a wave of increased public interest in better nutrition. This interest derived, as it seems, from the world economic depression of the early 1930's. On the one hand, there were millions of unemployed and their families, presenting a problem of minimum-cost feeding on an unprecedented scale for the modern state; on the other, there were world surpluses, even at the lowest prices on record, of the most important foodstuffs. Reformers pointed to a simultaneous solution of both these problems—the "marriage" of agriculture with nutrition. Significantly, the United States Department of Agriculture took a foremost part in drawing up optimum dietary standards; and when the League of Nations established a mixed commission on nutrition, it was the representatives of Australia, another primary producer of food, who took a forward part in it.

In the United Kingdom, on the other hand, the primary impulse was extragovernmental. It is true that as early as 1931 the Government had appointed an advisory committee on nutrition. But for the next few years the political winds were such as to chill at source any advice that might lead to expense on the social services. Titmuss has quoted (3, p. 514) the dictum, in 1934, of a high but lay administrator in the Ministry of Health, that a report signed by three of the most eminent experts of the day, expressing grave misgivings about the state of the people's health, was "improper, unfair, and heavily overdrawn." This attitude of mind was widespread among officials, who not unnaturally took their tone from the prevailing political climate; and it explains what might otherwise seem incredible, namely, that results of research into food consumption levels that had been undertaken under official auspices should have found their way into print, not in a government White Paper but in an unofficial monograph.

That monograph—*Food, Health, and Income*, by Sir John Boyd Orr, published in 1936 (4)—was enormously influential, and there is not wanting evidence that the Government of the day found it—and its author—an embarrassment. It is difficult to explain otherwise why, in the official report of the *Advisory Committee on Nutrition*, published in the following year (5), Orr's book was never mentioned by name. Indeed, the whole of this report might be taken as an effort to play down his more sensational conclusions. He had

averred, on the basis of a number of sample family budgets, that, in the terms of an optimum standard of food requirements, the adequacy of people's diet was related to their income; of the five income groups into which he divided the population, only the two highest could be said to enjoy a diet that was incapable of substantial improvement; the diet of the two lowest was grossly inadequate for proper health and well-being. It is, of course, quite easy to impugn this or that detail in the calculations, to point to the small size of the sample (a weakness shared by most if not all subsequent investigations of the kind), or to suggest that the requirement figures may have been overstated. But these, in relation to the main thesis urged in *Food, Health, and Income*, were pedantries. If, as was acknowledged in the Advisory Committee's Report, the diet of the nation was, on the average, something less than satisfactory, in that it was consuming too little milk and cheese and too much sugar, *a fortiori* half the nation was on a dietary standard in varying degrees worse than this. That (for example) the unemployed and their dependents, or old-age pensioners, were just not getting the right kinds of food in the right quantities was no more than a platitude. All that Orr had done was to state this in concrete and inescapable fashion.

The conclusion he drew—that the Government ought to initiate a food policy deliberately contrived to foster better nutrition of all the people—was one that, from the nature of the case, made a strong appeal to the Labour Opposition. There were, indeed, prominent supporters of the Government, or of no party, who sympathized with it. But Whitehall, even more than Westminster, was cautious, not to say lukewarm, in embracing the new gospel—whose financial and administrative implications certainly needed study. In consequence, the more enthusiastic apostles who were not already members of, say, the Fabian Society, tended to align themselves with the political Left, or at any rate Left-Center; and the problem of better nutrition became apt to get mixed up with schemes for the "planning" of economic life in general. The food scientist in a hurry to help his fellow men accepted, often rather uncritically, the economic doctrines of those who promised the quickest road toward his goal. On the other hand, officials whose work brought them into contact with nutritional questions were constrained to preserve an attitude of quasi-academic detachment. The Food (Defence Plans) Department itself, though two of its senior members had contributed to the material used by Orr, and one of these was a member of the Advisory Committee on Nutrition, nevertheless eschewed any syste-

matic exploration of wartime food policy. Partly this was due to lack of time; partly perhaps to the very familiarity of the problem, making it seem unnecessary to study it further; partly no doubt to the fact that a national food policy would involve agricultural questions outside the Department's terms of reference.

For some months after the war had actually broken out, this position hardly changed, so far as the Ministry of Food was concerned. Official responsibility for questions of nutrition still lay, as it was to continue to lie, with the Ministry of Health; but that Department's preoccupations were, for the time being, elsewhere—with the emergency medical service and the evacuation scheme—and the members of its food division, in the first months of war, found themselves with little or nothing to do. When, however, the Ministry of Food proposed to ration butter, bacon, and sugar, the Ministry of Health became active. It so happened that the then Minister, Mr. Walter Elliot, had himself received a medical training and was personally well acquainted with leading physiologists like Orr and Professor Cathcart. With rationing threatened, he called them into consultation; and they almost immediately propounded the view that the war presented a golden opportunity for actually improving the national diet. Meanwhile, another proponent of a forward nutrition policy, the biochemist Professor Drummond of the University of London, had been admitted into the Ministry of Food, so to speak by the back door, as adviser on the protection of food against poison gas; and there he found like-minded reformers, more especially among the temporary civil servants recruited to the Ministry's economics and statistics divisions.

Thus far, say up to February 1940, the influences working toward a policy of food welfare had been purely personal, the most important of them perhaps the accident that had brought Mr. Elliot to the Ministry of Health. (The Ministry was the successor to the former Local Government Board and strictly health matters occupied only a portion of its official territory.) That they had still before them the uphill task that besets all innovators will be apparent from the early history of the proposals for a national scheme to provide milk for mothers and children at a specially low price. One of the small measures taken, just before the war, to promote better nutrition had been the conferment of powers on, and the grant of a Treasury subsidy to, local authorities to provide cheap milk for children at school, and for expectant mothers and infants attending maternity and child-welfare clinics. The response of local authori-

ties to these schemes, despite the earnest advocacy of the Board of Education and the Ministry of Health, had been extremely patchy. Over half the population of England and Wales, for instance, lived in areas whose authorities were not supplying milk through their clinics. Moreover, both schemes had suffered serious setbacks through the evacuation of vulnerable cities at the outbreak of war, more particularly as, in general, the movement of population had been out of the more enlightened local authorities' areas into those of the more backward.

When, therefore, it became evident in December 1939 that higher costs of milk production would mean higher prices, the Ministry of Health became alarmed lest consumption should fall among mothers and children. As a setoff, it suggested that the local offices of the Ministry of Food, brought into being to administer rationing, should undertake to run a national scheme to provide expectant and nursing mothers and children under five with a pint of milk a day for the price of 2*d.* (half the ordinary retail price). Those whose means were below a certain level would be given free milk. (There were certain changes in the scheme as it developed; for the sake of simplicity I give only the form in which it finally came into force.)

To the Treasury, which was at this time preoccupied with the danger of monetary inflation, the proposal was anathema. There was no case, it argued, for starting a new social service in wartime, particularly one that imposed no means test. Anything that increased the demand for milk, which was likely to become scarce and was difficult to ration equitably, was particularly undesirable. There was more force in such arguments than the advocates of the scheme were willing to admit; the case for cheap milk rested on the existence of poverty and unemployment, and in wartime these evils were likely to be at their least powerful. If milk was to be dearer, there would nevertheless be few people who could not afford to pay the full price for it.

One might have expected, therefore, a long interdepartmental argument, culminating in an emasculated scheme. That, instead, it was put fully into force in July 1940—incidentally, without adequate administrative preparation—can only be accounted for by the seemingly desperate war situation and the generous emotions it provoked. Lord Woolton, who had replaced Mr. Morrison at the Ministry of Food in April, was a philanthropic businessman inclined to make light of administrative obstacles; he took up the scheme with vigor just before Mr. Elliot, its original sponsor, disappeared

from Ministerial office with the change of Government in May 1940. The entry of the Labour Party into Mr. Churchill's coalition strengthened the hands of the scheme's supporters and "put paid" to any proposal for a general "means test." But even so, one feels it was the Dunkirk evacuation that caused the Treasury ramparts to crumble.

THE NATIONAL MILK SCHEME

As introduced, the National Milk Scheme, as it was called, was in principle simple. Parents or guardians of children under five, and expectant mothers whose condition was duly certified by a doctor, midwife, or "health visitor," might obtain on formal application one pint of milk a day at the reduced price (or free if their family income was below a certain figure) from a retailer of their choice; the Government paid the difference on receipt of a claim from the retailer. Partly because the scheme had been introduced at short notice, a host of administrative anomalies arose in the first few months. At first it was virtually impossible, for instance, to prosecute false claimants, since until April 1941 the scheme was allowed to operate without specific statutory authority (6). Rulings had to be given about the definition of "income" for the purposes of free milk: for instance, when a poor householder was threatened with losing the entitlement to free milk because the authorities had billeted a mother and three children on her, and the billeting allowance of a few shillings a week brought her income above the limit, the case was settled by excluding billeting allowances from the definition. Special arrangements had to be made for children in institutions, or under five but attending nursery school. Problems of responsibility within the Ministry of Food arose, the Ministry's Milk Officers, appointed to run the scheme, being answerable not to the local Food Executive Officer in whose office they worked, but to Headquarters through the Divisional Milk Officer. These and many other difficulties took months and even years to iron out; even the form of application was revised several times before being abolished when it was decided to make the possession of a child's ration book (which was to be issued to mothers before the birth) confer automatic entitlement to cheap milk. This, however, did not happen till 1943.

More important than any merely administrative complications, however, was the path down which the Ministry of Food was pushed as a result of a decision, taken just before the scheme was launched,

to provide dried milk, at the same price as the liquid milk, for those infants for whom the latter was thought to be unsuitable. The original specification for *National Dried Milk*, as it was called, was drawn up by the Ministry of Health; it consisted simply of roller-dried, full-cream milk of a specified fat content. On the other hand, the various brands of dried milk generally sold for infant feeding, and distributed by local authorities through welfare centers, were modified in various ways—by removal of part of the cream, and/or the addition of sodium citrate, iron, or vitamin D. Many medical men were found to aver that the unmodified National Dried Milk was unsuitable for infants, and pressure was put on the Ministry of Food to alter the formula. The Ministry, however, felt that this would take it into deep waters. The baby-food manufacturers, on whom it relied for making National Dried Milk, were already complaining of the competition of a subsidized product; it had not intended to provide any more than a dried substitute for liquid milk, leaving the welfare centers to deal with special cases. The most it was willing to do was to provide a “half-cream” variety of National Dried Milk; and this was introduced in July 1941.

The pediatricians, who had been foremost in pressing for a fortified National Dried Milk, were far from being satisfied; but for three years the matter rested there. In February 1944 the agitation was revived by the publication of an officially sponsored report on the incidence of rickets in wartime (7), despite the fact that, according to the report, rickets had not increased. On the face of it, the case for adding vitamin D to the milk was weaker than it had been three years earlier, for by this time expectant mothers and children were entitled to cheap or free Government cod-liver oil. It was known, however, that only about one-quarter of those entitled to this were taking it; fortification of food, as of bread with chalk, was now, as it had not been in 1941, accepted practice; and though the opposition of the manufacturers of branded baby foods might be as vehement as ever, it was to this extent weakened, that their trade had not been damaged by the introduction of the Government milk. On the contrary, it had increased, for a variety of reasons. There was the appeal of the branded product, exploited by advertising that played sometimes on snobbery, always on ignorance of the insignificant differences between one brand and another. More important, perhaps, mothers could obtain the proprietary milks, whether at the chemist or through the welfare centers, without giving up their right to cheap liquid milk under the scheme. To use this milk for

the household, instead of for the nominal beneficiary, was forbidden, but could not be prevented. Moreover, there was nothing to stop childless people from buying baby foods and using them to eke out their scanty “nonpriority” milk supplies.

The decision of the new Minister of Food, Colonel Llewellyn, to reverse that of his predecessor and add vitamin D to National Dried Milk, found the trade divided and unable to organize effective resistance. The Ministry escaped public criticism even when, toward the end of the war, the threatened shortage of the raw material of all types of milk-based baby food—roller-dried milk powder—caused the Ministry to withdraw the guaranty of unlimited supplies that it had hitherto been able to allow the trade; even when, a little later on, the need to curb “priority” usage of milk led to the sale of proprietary baby foods being restricted, by Order, to those who could produce a child’s ration book. The Ministry had indeed traveled far beyond the limited intentions of 1940, themselves felt to be a bold gesture of social reform. It was marketing, at a subsidized price, a baby food which to all intents and purposes was identical with the commercial product and was made under the same conditions; and yet, thanks to the ignorance of the public and perhaps of their medical advisers, it was able to do so without encroaching on the manufacturers’ legitimate trade. The postwar period was to demonstrate that the two sorts of dried milk could settle down amicably side by side; National Dried Milk, so far from ousting the proprietary brands, appears to have opened up an entirely new market.

VITAMIN SUPPLEMENTS

The National Milk Scheme had been introduced before the Ministry of Food had developed machinery for keeping the food situation, in its scientific aspect, under constant review. In the spring of 1941, when food supplies were at their worst, but expected shortly to improve thanks to the passage of the Lend-Lease Act, the scientists advising the Government were much exercised about supplies of vitamins A and C, particularly for the so-called “vulnerable groups” in the population, who were covered by the Milk Scheme. Supplies of citrus fruit from overseas had been cut almost to vanishing point on account of the shortage of ships; those of cod-liver oil, a main source of vitamin A, had fallen because of the reduction in the British fishing fleet and the closure of the more remote fishing grounds.

The Ministry of Food therefore undertook to procure, and to distribute to mothers and children, concentrates of these vitamins. A special mission was sent to Reykjavik, and eventually reached an agreement with the Iceland Government whereby the Ministry of Food bought one-half of the total supply of cod-liver oil available during the calendar year 1941. The terms of this contract led to some difficulty, since Iceland felt she could get a higher price by selling the whole of her catch to the United States; in the following year, therefore, the U.S. Agricultural Marketing Administration bought the whole of the catch, and the United Kingdom obtained its requirements under Lend-Lease. No more oil was required from Iceland until 1944, but (presumably as a part of the policy of reducing the number of "offshore" purchases under Lend-Lease) the British Government then reverted to direct purchase. The oil so obtained was blended with arachis (groundnut) oil in varying degrees to obtain a standard vitamin potency. Later the "Government oil" came in for criticism as being too weak in vitamin D, and it was decided to reinforce it with synthetic calciferol. This was in some measure compensation for the Ministry's initial refusal to "fortify" National Dried Milk.

As for concentrated vitamin C, the only home sources, other than the synthetic product—of which it was desired to build up stocks against contingent demands—were black currants and rose hips. Only a part of the black currant crop could be spared from jam, and although the Ministry of Health sponsored a scheme for making syrup from rose hips collected by women's organizations, supplies were not enough, nor sufficiently reliable, for this syrup to be used in the Government distribution scheme. The Ministry of Food therefore decided to ask the United States to provide concentrated orange juice under Lend-Lease. From March 1942 this juice—bottled, standardized, and sweetened by British manufacturing chemists under a standard Ministry of Food label—replaced the black currant syrup and purée with which the scheme had been launched, three months earlier. After the end of Lend-Lease, orange juice from Palestine (now Israel) was substituted.

At first, mainly it seems for want of devising a simple means of payment that would not load food offices and welfare centers—many of which were run by part-time volunteers—with complicated accounting transactions, fruit juices and cod-liver oil were distributed free of charge. But by April 1942 a scheme of prepayment by postage stamps, to the value of 5*d.* a bottle for cod-liver oil, and 10*d.* a

bottle for orange juice, had been worked out. At first, special forms to which the stamps could be affixed were issued to beneficiaries under the scheme. Later, entitlement to cheap milk and vitamins were given automatically to all holders of the green "child's" ration book (R.B.2) and spaces for stamps were provided in this book.

Unlike the National Milk Scheme, the Vitamin Scheme was slow to take hold of the minds of the public, for all that it was consistently "pushed" by all the varied publicity devices of which the Ministry was by this time master. An enquiry undertaken on the Ministry's behalf in October 1942, covering six large towns, disclosed that less than half those entitled to orange juice, and less than one-third of those entitled to cod-liver oil, were taking it. Over the country as a whole, consumption (in terms of theoretical entitlement) was even smaller—one-fifth or less in January 1943. Various reasons were adduced for this disappointing response: the unpleasant taste of the oil (described by one Ministry official as "horrible"); the competition of proprietary vitamin preparations, recommended by doctors in preference to the Ministry product (compare the similar suspicion of National Dried Milk); the need for mothers to travel some distance to food office or clinic to get the products; a tendency to discontinue orange juice in winter and cod-liver oil in summer. Aggressive advertising, together with the extension of entitlement to all holders of the green ration book, was accompanied by a rise in consumption, by January 1944, to an estimated 49 percent of the possible for orange juice, and 25 percent for cod-liver oil; a year later, however, it had fallen back to 43 and 21 percent, respectively. The vitamin tablets for expectant mothers, introduced in April 1943, showed the same trend—37 percent at the beginning of 1944, 32 percent a year later. These figures were to be improved upon in the postwar years, and they must not, of course, be taken (though at the time the Ministry was inclined to take them) as evidence that a corresponding proportion of the population was going seriously short of vitamins. For, (*a*) it seems likely that the Ministry's advocacy of vitamin supplements boosted the sales of the proprietary article, and as Professor Titmuss has shown (3, p. 529), more people were dosing themselves with vitamins than ever before; (*b*) the recommended dose was rather more than very young infants either required or could tolerate; (*c*) the shortage of vitamins from other sources did not develop to the extent that was feared; and (*d*) there is, to say the least, some uncertainty about the estimates of vitamin requirements on which the policy was based—indeed, the

Ministry's advisers habitually chose to be on the safe side in these matters. By the same token, one would be hard put to it to justify the Vitamin Scheme by results, for despite the disappointing response, no evidence of deficiency diseases on any scale has been produced.

There was one other "welfare food" that ought to be mentioned; "National Milk-Cocoa," a food-drink of cocoa, dried milk, and sugar devised by the Scientific Adviser to the Ministry, for service to adolescents employed in industry through their works canteens. It never acquired great popularity, and in 1951 its manufacture was discontinued. Orange juice and cod-liver oil, on the other hand, seem now to have taken their places alongside milk as permanent features of the Welfare State.

The nation-wide distribution of cheap milk and vitamin supplements was not the administrative problem it would have been in peacetime, because the machinery of rationing by consumer-retailer tie had called for the establishment of a large number of local food offices. Rationing on a different system, with coupons and flow-back but without registration, would perhaps not have provided a satisfactory local basis for the welfare foods scheme. Certainly the insertion of coupons for these foods into the ration book, and the combination, in the case of milk, of the low privilege price with the right to priority supplies, provided the greatest possible incentive to take advantage of them. The ration book was truly an organ of welfare.

FOOD SUBSIDIES

Special provision for the "vulnerable groups" was, on account of its prewar antecedents, the earliest manifestation of a policy of food welfare. In the later years of the Welfare Foods Schemes, emphasis was officially laid on the need to promote a *general* rise in the consumption of protective foods of which enough might not otherwise have been eaten. This was natural because, with the rise in money incomes that the war brought about, free supplies to those showing need dwindled to very small proportions. But at the time the National Milk Scheme was being discussed, in early 1940, it was thought of as a measure in aid of the poor; and there was some talk of making arrangements for supplies of other foods at an especially low price. The United States "blue stamp" plan for subsidizing food to persons on relief was much referred to; so was an experiment made by the British Potato Marketing Board in Bishop Auckland,

County Durham, before the war, when unemployed workers were allowed specially cheap potatoes. One of the results of food control had been the "pooling" of qualities of butter and bacon, for example, for sale at an average price that *ex hypothesi* had to be higher than that ruling for the lowest grades. In the first months of war, thanks to heavier freight charges, war-risk insurance, and the devaluation of sterling, prices of imported foods had risen sharply; but this rise, as it would be reflected in the official cost-of-living index, was much less than the amount by which the cost of the cheapest varieties of food had risen. The Government's interdepartmental committee on food prices, set up in November 1939, kept a watchful eye not only on the index, but on the cost of the "minimum diet" devised by the British Medical Association in 1933. Soon after taking office in May 1940, Lord Woolton approached leading food manufacturers about the possibility of producing specially cheap "lines" for the benefit of the poor; and when control was reimposed on margarine a little later, it was decided to abandon the single quality originally provided for in the control scheme in favor of two—of which the higher-priced "Special" should subsidize the "Standard." So, too, one of the reasons for not abolishing branded teas was that a standard "National" tea would be too expensive for the poor.

Experience was to show that this solicitude was, at any rate in the long run, misplaced under war conditions. Sales of the "standard" margarine steadily declined, although its food value was identical to that of the "special," and their differences in flavor and texture, never commensurate with the difference in price (5d. and 9d. a pound), tended to diminish because of the difficulty of obtaining the more desirable ingredients—a difficulty that increased, of course, with the increased demand for "special" margarine. As for tea, the Ministry was increasingly faced with what it called a "scramble for higher-priced teas," resulting from public belief that they must be of better quality. Yet so far from being able to allocate extra quantities of finer teas for blending, it was obliged by supply difficulties to put out coarser teas that in peacetime might never have come on the United Kingdom market at all; and throughout the war it wrestled vainly to prevent an unscrupulous minority of traders from exploiting the situation by selling tea whose label was its only claim to distinction.

From the point of view of administration, therefore, it must be counted as fortunate that the policy of differential subsidy was not extended. The reason was not, however, foresight on the Govern-

ment's part; on the contrary, it was something it had failed to foresee—the initial rise in prices on the outbreak of war. This failure was odd, because fear of inflation had been the initial impulse in 1933–34, that ultimately gave rise, under the stimulus of the agitation for security stocks, to the setting up of the Food (Defence Plans) Department. The development of prewar official reasoning on this problem of inflation and price fixing is not easy to follow: but it seems that the external factors that might, and in the event did, give import costs an upward push were largely neglected; that “profiteering” was, *per contra*, regarded as the most likely cause of a price rise, and it was expected to be looked after by controls; that the difficulties in the way of a general wage freeze were not generally appreciated, in spite of the warnings of the Ministry of Labour; and that, while the Treasury did not delude itself that all inflation could be avoided, it did expect and hope that large-scale subsidies, such as that to bread in the war of 1914, might not be necessary. There was indeed a school of thought, innocent of any knowledge of nutrition, that supposed that food consumption could be largely reduced in wartime and that food subsidies were bad because they would encourage it. It was this type of argument that may have led to the imposition, in Sir John Simon's emergency budget of September 1939, of an extra tax on sugar.

By December 1939, however, the rise in import prices had gone so far that the Ministry of Food, as much for want of time to revise its price schedules as anything else, was already incurring losses on its trading account at the rate of a million pounds a week. The Government, which was endeavoring to get organized labor to agree to a policy of voluntary restraint in wage claims, felt that these negotiations would be wrecked if, as would be necessary to balance the food budget, the official cost-of-living index were to rise overnight by twelve points. A reluctant Treasury was therefore driven to concede that a “temporary” subsidy in aid of prices would be expedient; and once the concession was made, there was no doing away with it. The decision to expand food production carried with it higher prices that were not passed on to the consumer; the long wrangles over the extent of the increase in farming costs, and to what extent it should be reimbursed, led to a decision, in September 1940, to subsidize prices of animal feedstuffs; finally, largely under pressure from other Departments, the Treasury adopted price stabilization of all articles in common use as a deliberate policy, announced in Sir Kingsley Wood's budget speech in April 1941. Such a policy would

scarcely have been possible earlier, because the administrative means to enforce it did not exist; even so it caused much embarrassment to the Ministry of Food over eggs and fish.

The kingpin of the stabilization policy was the official cost-of-living index compiled monthly by the Ministry of Labour; for this there were two reasons, one obvious, the other occult. The first was that wages in many industries were fixed, by agreement between employers and employed, with reference to the index figure, which was also customarily used by many others as a basis for collective bargaining. The second lay in the make-up of the index itself, which, as Henry Smith has remarked (8, p. 85), was

devoted to the somewhat peculiar purpose of ascertaining what the value of money would be to a hypothetical and extremely conservative working-class family intent on maintaining the standard of living and the habits of consumption to which it was accustomed in 1914.

Not only were the components of this index and their weighting very much out of date, but certain items—electric light and power, beer, wines, and spirits, for example—did not figure in it. Others again, such as eggs, were overweighted in comparison with the amounts available in wartime; tobacco, on the other hand, was underweighted. It was therefore possible to make the very imperfections of the index the basis of what can most accurately be defined as a pious fraud: pious, in that real wages simply had to fall in wartime, and industrial peace required that this be made acceptable to organized labor; fraudulent, in that subsidies to index foods were, in effect, financed out of much larger levies on beer and tobacco and were, furthermore, manipulated to some extent so as to give the largest return in index “points” for a given expenditure of money. Eggs are a conspicuous example, though here the subsidy was valued also as a means of attracting them into legal channels of distribution. Some “welfare-minded” officials could be found to argue that to tax Father's tobacco in order to reduce Mother's food bills had intrinsic merit, and defenders of food subsidies at the present time often represent them as measures of assistance to the family. In origin, however, they were anti-inflationary purely and simply, and for that very reason took precedence, in Government policy, of differential subsidies that would, at less financial but greater administrative cost, have tempered the wind to the shorn lamb and to him alone.

It must be emphasized, however, that this was the only type of price stabilization that was possible for the United Kingdom at that

time. There was virtually no possibility of meeting the increasing cost of the food subsidies, year after year, except by indirect and highly regressive taxation; the possibilities of "soaking the rich" had already been exhausted. The replacement of the official index by one more truly representative of the wartime pattern of consumption would have made this clear, and indeed would have brought the stabilization policy to an abrupt end. By the same token, however, subsidies cannot properly be spoken of as being a "burden" on the Exchequer, for they represent merely a compulsory transfer of funds from the citizen as taxpayer to the citizen as consumer.

In practice, subsidies appear to be almost inseparable from a system of controlled prices, if only because administrative difficulties limit the frequency with which these can be adjusted by negotiation, culminating in Statutory Rule and Order. This comes out most clearly in the relation of the utility-clothing scheme to food prices. When the scheme was introduced, the extent to which it would bring about a fall in the cost-of-living index had been underestimated. But, rather than revise the whole of the complicated price schedule in order to get the clothing contribution to the index "right"—that is, to produce the exact figure to which the Treasury had bound itself—it was decided to revise food prices upward, even though, because of rising costs, a subsidy would in future have to be given to utility cloth. To its disgust, therefore, the Ministry of Food became responsible for a series of small price adjustments that had no relation whatsoever to the requirements of food control. The Ministry was much relieved when, at the beginning of 1944, the Treasury decided to allow a slight upward movement in the index and did not ask for reductions in food prices in order to offset rises in the price of fuel. Nevertheless, it remained and remains true that the Ministry of Food's administrative success in controlling food prices, without which, of course, a subsidy policy could not be applied, resulted in a retail price pattern that was wholly conventional and artificial.

There were, of course, people who, through poverty or inclination, paid less in taxes than the average cost per head of the general food subsidies and thus could be said to benefit from them—non-smokers with large families, and old-age pensioners, for example. But this does not alter the general principle that, so far from being a measure designed to promote welfare, the subsidies were a sacrifice of the welfare principle to one deemed more important, namely, the prevention of inflation. Opinions are divided on whether this end

was achieved (9); there was a tendency to argue, in the light of the enormous size (over £400 million) to which the subsidies grew in the postwar period, that it was not, and to urge their replacement by a less expensive series of allowances to those (and only those) who would be hard hit by their abolition.

Without going into the abstract merits of such a proposal, several things need to be said. The first is that in 1939/40 there must have been a whole series of wage claims had not the subsidies been introduced. Second, that the settlement of these claims might, at a time when an increasing proportion of industrial production was for Government account, have cost the Treasury more, in hard cash, than the subsidies. Third, that the postwar rise in world food prices could not readily have been foreseen at that time; on the contrary, there was good reason to expect a fall that would have enabled the subsidies to be removed. Fourth, that the subsidies ought not properly to be regarded as having been granted out of general revenue, but rather as a partial compensation for the levying of much heavier indirect taxation that, but for the peculiar make-up of the cost-of-living index, would have itself constituted an occasion for wage increases. To remove the subsidies without granting corresponding remissions of such taxation would, therefore, savor of sharp practice; it would be replacing an illusory benefit by a real impost.

WATCHING CONSUMPTION TRENDS

While, therefore, specific measures of food welfare were less common, and less important, than is sometimes supposed, it is true that the whole of the Ministry's procurement and control policy, from about mid-1941 onward, was imbued with a continual reference to those optimum standards of feeding for which Orr and the other reformers had pleaded. Acceptance of these principles may be said to date from the spring of 1940, when those responsible for drawing up the Ministry of Food import program for the second year of war were bidden to consult with Professor Drummond, now appointed Chief Scientific Adviser; but it was more than another year before satisfactory methods of routine consultation between scientists and practical administrators were worked out and applied both within the Ministry itself and interdepartmentally. The interim period, covering the critical winter of 1940/41, found the scientists at their most dogmatic, and administrators, whether in acceptance or rejection of scientific proposals, less discriminating than they later became. From this period date the enthusiasm for carrots, the abortive

campaign for compulsory slaughter, and the oatmeal shortage, provoked by a subsidy and an advertising campaign that ignored the country's limited oatmeal milling capacity. But equally this was the time when separate divisions of the Ministry, faced with all sorts of shortages, were taking all sorts of measures, such as granting priority supplies, *ad hoc*, without any reference to the food position as a whole. Wrote an official in February 1941:

Unless we can, as a background, have some sort of consumption programme, even though . . . it is lacerated and disfigured in infancy by a multitude of amendments, we shall be sailing into an increasingly turbulent sea without a master chart and attempting to steer a course from a mass of small bits of paper marked "Chocolate priority for Civil Defence," or "Fats allocated to bakers."

This position was ended by the creation within the Ministry of a *Food Supply Board*, with committees covering imports, home production, utilization, etc., who between them reviewed the whole of food supply and distribution. The Utilisation Committee, for instance, would have before it calculations purporting to show the exact effect on the national diet of the quantities of food proposed to be released in each ration period of four weeks; and an attempt was made to balance, for example, reduced supplies of cheese by larger allocations of other proteins such as canned meat. Some of the calculations were, perhaps, a bit overdone, some small changes taken too seriously, but this was a fault on the right side. The food situation was potentially, at any rate, too critical for any possibilities of danger to be neglected.

The care with which, in the later years of war, import, home production, and consumption and rationing programs were worked out was matched by continual efforts on the part of the Government to assess the food position. The Ministry of Food instituted a sample survey of family food purchases, mostly of the "working class," whose results were evaluated in terms of nutrients. In 1943 it started a "body-weight" survey, by which periodic samples were taken of the weights of a cross section of the population. The Ministry of Health and the Medical Research Council were responsible for further inquiries, mainly seeking to assess the clinical evidence, as of the hemoglobin content of the blood, that might indicate the state of nutrition of individuals, particularly those in the "vulnerable groups"; and yet others were made by voluntary associations or individual experts, often with the co-operation of the Government. Moreover, these inquiries were not limited to the field of nutrition;

they extended to such evidences of food difficulties as the habit of forming queues for such things as cake and fish.

It was perhaps not altogether, or even mainly, the fault of the investigators that these numerous activities should, as is evident from the postwar review undertaken by the British Medical Association (10), have been more than a little inconclusive. The very caution with which food programing was done, the tendency to play for safety in supplies whenever there was the slightest reason to apprehend the development of dietary deficiency, would of itself account for that. Nevertheless it seems likely that some part of the inquiries was misconceived, in that signs of inadequate feeding were expected to reveal themselves sooner, and more dramatically, than is the case outside the laboratory. In certain instances, it might be said that the techniques employed were the reverse of those that would be needed to provide a sensitive measure of a change for the worse. There seems little point, for instance, in periodically measuring the body weights of persons whose activity may fluctuate, in order to determine the early onset of a deficiency in calories. It is surely wrong to blur the interesting, and perhaps important, variations in family food consumption by reducing them to a simple average that *ex hypothesi* must reflect the average level of supplies, or to expend much speculation on the gap between these two latter figures, arising (errors in the evidence excepted) from the exclusion from the family survey of meals taken outside the home and of various kinds of waste. The misdirection of effort that these activities, in the writer's opinion, represent must be put down partly to the novelty of the problems in practice, but partly also to the want, so far, of sufficiently hard thinking by those concerned. One does not need to be either statistician or expert on nutrition to detect haziness, sometimes coupled with dogmatism, in much writing on, for instance, the problem of measuring and comparing national food consumption levels, even where the conclusions reached are themselves impeccable. The Combined Food Board's official Consumption Levels Inquiries, particularly the first, serve as a good illustration (11).

Here, however, one touches on weaknesses not chargeable to the investigator. One is the pressure on political grounds for definite "results" that can be used in securing supplies. It is hardly too much to say that throughout the war the Ministry of Food was at pains to insist on two propositions that, unless great care was taken, might be perceived to be irreconcilable—the first, that the United

Kingdom was being well fed, the second, that any sizable reduction in food supplies would mean disaster. The defense of these propositions threatened to involve, if it did not actually involve, the Ministry's experts in an exaggeration both of the importance of small changes, and of the practical possibility of measuring them, that could not have been sustained if the principles of nutrition had been more generally understood, or if, perhaps, those for whom the arguments were intended had been less than benevolent toward the United Kingdom case. Comparison of the work of Ancel Keys on adult human calorie requirements (12, pp. 1-10) with some of the statistical hairsplitting of the first Consumption Levels Inquiry report makes this abundantly clear; but the same point was made by Beveridge (13, p. 314) more than twenty years ago when he remarked:

Investigations of actual working-class budgets . . . usually lead to the conclusion that a substantial part of the working population of this country is by scientific standards habitually underfed. They should lead, but do not often enough lead, to the further question as to how such results can be reconciled with the improving average physique of the population, and perhaps even to a doubt as to the scientific standard itself.

(One ought in fairness to add that recent work, for instance the "recommended nutritional allowances" of the United States Food and Nutrition Board, shows a great improvement in this respect.)

It is necessary to make these criticisms of the application of scientific knowledge to food policy and administration, if only to explain the seeming vagaries of the latter: how eggs, at one time publicly declared to be "not an essential food," should, in their dried form, be boosted by all the resources of Ministry of Food publicity, only to be quietly dropped when, with the end of Lend-Lease, they ceased to be available; how even bread rationing, which the scientists had fought tooth and nail, suddenly became acceptable. It was not that the principles of nutrition had proved themselves mutable in the light of the cold realities of the supply situation, but rather that scientists, called upon to supply answers in words of one syllable to the questions of lay Ministers and administrators, found truth to be subtle and many-sided. What had been carried through, in the years between 1939 and 1942, was a revolution in food policy that called for a new kind of operational research, directed firmly toward practical ends and, above all, maintaining a sense of proportion. Academic criteria, even when (as was inevitably not always the case) applied by the best minds, could not be adapted overnight to these new purposes. It was not easy to recognize at once the point at

which increasing refinement of calculation led to returns diminishing in usefulness, to discard ruthlessly the interesting speculation that could not be realized in policy, to admit ignorance in the face of those who must take decisions with or without the benefit of the scientists' advice. On the contrary, the temptation was strong to indulge a new-found, and for all one knew, transient popularity to start up as many projects as possible, just in case they might be useful. Some extravagances so launched have already been pruned—the body-weight survey, for instance, is no more—and the general mood has already become more sober than in the enthusiastic days of the Basal Diet. Even the dictum of Starling, once, as it seemed, wholly outmoded—"Take care of the calories, and the proteins will take care of themselves"—is coming back to favor with meaning extended beyond proteins to other *nutrients*. The emphasis on welfare remains, as a lasting contribution from war to peacetime policies.

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CHAPTER 9

FOOD AND AIR RAIDS: COMMUNAL FEEDING

PREPARATIONS AGAINST AIR ATTACK

The pattern of British food control at its zenith, say in 1944, reflects in its intricacy the way in which the war had developed; it was well suited to resist the attrition of the enemy blockade, or to promote the economy of national resources toward the day of counter-offensive. It would not have been so well suited for the war that had been expected—a war that should have opened with devastating raids on British towns, calculated, according to the United Kingdom air staff, to cause 600,000 civilian dead, and correspondingly larger numbers of wounded, in the first two months, and (according to the psychologists advising the Government) three to four million cases of panic and hysteria (*I*, chapters i and ii). It was that war against which, at one time in the prewar discussions, there was talk of calling out the military to prevent by force a “disorderly general flight” from the bombed cities.

It was a whole year after the outbreak of war before the enemy bombers came over in force, and their ability to kill and wound proved to be far less than had been expected. (Over the war years, automobiles injured more civilians than bombs, and cases of neurosis were actually fewer than in peacetime. The problem of the homeless was perhaps the most intractable result of the raids.) So far as food was concerned, the year’s respite had been used, not in making specific provision against air attack, but in establishing and strengthening the control machine. The Ministry of Food was able, by dint of rapid improvisation, to cope with the results of the raids; and in the subsequent years it built up a complete “emergency” organization that in the event was never severely tested. Had an equal weight of attack been delivered a year earlier, there would have been no firmly established food organization upon which to improvise, and effective action might have been difficult if not impossible. Much more then, in relation to the kind of attack that was *expected*, must the prewar preparations be judged inadequate.

For this inadequacy excuses are not hard to find. Until after Munich the senior staff of the Food (Defence Plans) Department

did not run into double figures, and at no time was it equal, in quantity *and* caliber combined, to the tasks it had to perform. (Many of the early-discovered flaws in the rationing machinery were due to officials being assigned work for which their grade did not qualify them.) Nor had the air raid problem been entirely neglected. Plans had been devised for dispersing from London some of its food stocks during the “precautionary” period before war broke out; wholesalers and retailers had been encouraged to enter into “mutual assistance pacts,” and the central meat market at Smithfield was to be dispersed into depots in the suburbs. Above all, an elaborate, and in the event disastrous, scheme had been prepared for closing down the fish markets in the ports and principal cities—including London’s Billingsgate—and transferring them to arbitrarily selected centers inland. This scheme was precipitately introduced on the outbreak of war, but caused so much confusion and criticism that it had to be abandoned and was never revived even when the air raids did come. Had war been delayed for, say, another year, similar schemes might well have been put into effect for other commodities; there was actually one for potatoes, which, largely on account of the odium the fish scheme had brought upon the Ministry of Food, was scrapped before it could come into operation. As it was, the outbreak of war actually had the effect of diverting energies that might have been spent on further anti-air-raid measures, into the pressing task of getting control to work—a task that was barely completed by the autumn of 1940.

The reason why the food plans, in this aspect, were at once over-ambitious and incomplete is, however, not wholly or mainly to be found within the Department itself, but rather in the organization of the Committee of Imperial Defence, to which the Department was in matters of policy ultimately answerable. Sir William Beveridge in 1936 had told the Government (2):

To think out in advance *and as a whole*, the civilian side of the next war is as important as to design measures of military attack and defence.

But there is ample evidence of the inability of Whitehall to bring about such a synthesis. Sir William Beveridge’s observation itself might almost seem a platitude, did not one know that it had been provoked by his appointment to be chairman of an advisory committee whose terms of reference were limited to the administrative arrangements for food rationing (as distinct from food control as a whole). At no time before the war were the separate assumptions

about evacuation of vulnerable cities, diversion of shipping to unaccustomed ports, control of road and rail transport, imports of food in the first year of war, and the trend of food prices—to take just a few examples—subjected to rigorous critical analysis, whether in themselves or in relation to each other.

For these civilian aspects of war preparation there existed no “general staff”; the Committee of Imperial Defence did its work through a series of *ad hoc* subcommittees which studied, as Sir Keith Hancock has said, “bits and pieces of the economic problem” (3, p. 47). The committees relied for their information, not on a specially trained secretariat, but on the separate government departments; that is to say, on administrators, for whom the task of preparing appreciations was often, evidently, an unaccustomed and perhaps unwelcome duty. (The Food [Defence Plans] Department certainly thought so, and only had recourse to the Committee of Imperial Defence when it was obliged to do so.) As a result, the work of the committees tended to take on an “administrative” color, in that papers submitted to them received searching scrutiny in proportion to their immediate and controversial practical consequences. Moreover, while errors of fact stood a fair chance of detection, errors of a remoter sort, as in logical deduction or analysis, were likely to pass unnoticed, so that they might become inextricably embedded in a ruling of the Committee of Imperial Defence, as such acquiring sanctity and invulnerability.

Thus one such *ad hoc* committee, after sitting for three years, produced in 1936 a lengthy and sanguine report on shipping diversion and port clearance that received the *imprimatur* of the main Committee. Early in 1939 someone who understood the subject examined the report and rightly pronounced it “complete nonsense”; even so, it was never formally superseded. A rough assumption, adopted by the Committee for the sake of argument in 1936, that shortage of shipping would necessitate a reduction in food imports of 25 percent, had by 1938 so escaped its context as to be made a chief prop in the assertion, in another paper prepared for the Committee, that there would be no shortage of shipping at the outbreak of war. The next year, the Food (Defence Plans) Department, assuming on the same authority that 25 percent of its cargoes would fail to arrive, saw no incongruity in increasing its hypothetical loading programs overseas by one-third, to take care of the deficiency.

(Not that Service advisers were immune from this sort of mistake; on the contrary, the Air Staff’s calculation of casualties to be

expected was derived, as Professor Titmuss (1, p. 557) has shown, by a simple process of multiplying the casualty figures per ton of bombs dropped in the German raids of 1914–18 by the tonnage the enemy was expected to drop this time, without any allowance for bombs dropped on targets already destroyed or evacuated. A similar process applied to air-raid “incidents” during the last war led to some heavily bombed areas being credited with a total of “houses damaged” that was far in excess of the total houses they possessed.)

There was, that is to say, an all-pervading want of rigor in official thinking, which cannot be explained merely by want of time or staff or by what cannot but have been a discouraging political atmosphere, and which was all the more serious because of the limited resources in money and manpower that were being applied to war preparations. It resulted in misdirection of effort; too large a scale of plans for evacuation and emergency hospital services (the latter at the expense of the chronic sick and indeed of all normal medical requirements); little or no provision for clearing of debris, emergency feeding of air-raid victims, or salvage of damaged commodities. Had there not been in the first year of war an altogether unexpected respite from direct attack, this weakness in analysis, inasmuch as it made right decisions by Ministers not merely difficult, but impossible, might have had grave and even fatal consequences.

AIR RAIDS ON LONDON

The air raids on Great Britain, as they affected food, fall into three broad classes. First, there was the sustained attack by night on London, beginning in September 1940 and continuing, in greater or less intensity, until May 1941. Second, there were the sporadic attacks on provincial towns, of which the notorious raid on Coventry, in November 1940, may stand as example, and which persisted, in the so-called Baedeker raids of 1942, long after they could pretend to military significance. Third, there was the renewed attack, first by piloted aircraft and then by flying bomb and rocket, on London, which—thanks to the inaccuracy of these automatic weapons—affected the whole of southeast England; in this last attack the lessons learned from the earlier raids may be said to have been successfully applied by the defense.

The requirements for meeting air attack, as they took shape during the winter of 1940/41 out of the incomplete and rather vague arrangements that had been made in advance, can likewise be classi-

164
~~had as three.~~ First, there had to be emergency feeding facilities, not merely for those made homeless by air attack (for which a rough-and-ready rest center service, to be much improved under pressure of events, had already been devised) but for those unable to cook their own meals for want of water, gas, or electricity, for those suffering from shock, and for those who spent nights on end in public shelters or "trekked" into the country from towns like Hull that suffered from repeated raids. Second, there had to be first-aid and restorative measures to keep normal food distribution going. Third, and rather apart from the first two, measures were required to ensure the salvage of food from damaged premises and the repair of food-processing plant.

Although the bombardment of Greater London far exceeded, in weight and duration, anything that fell on other cities, there were compensations that caused the food situation there to give less cause for anxiety than in less important centers. London was the obvious target, and hence better prepared for the attacks both in physical resources and in state of mind. The inner part of it had, in the London County Council, a wealthy and well staffed local authority, closely in touch with the central Government, accustomed to large-scale activity, as in purchasing food, and—thanks to the policy of evacuation—able to dispose of considerable surplus resources, such as disused school buildings, that might be pressed into service for emergency feeding. There was equally a margin of safety on the side of normal food distribution; stocks of food in London warehouses far exceeded the requirements of the reduced population; there was ample surplus capacity in bread baking and milk processing, and the bakers and dairymen had already formed, at the Ministry of Food's instance, mutual assistance pacts whereby it could be immediately brought into play; the Smithfield meat market had already been dispersed to eight suburban depots.

Moreover, London was so huge that the heaviest attack affected only a small part of it, and help could readily be brought in from unaffected districts, or by alternative routes. (One of the greatest single raids, the incendiary bomb raid on the "City" on December 29–30, 1940, was comparatively unimportant for food because the resident population of this, the business district, is only a few thousands. A daylight raid on the area, had that been possible, must have been a far worse problem from every point of view.) It is a remarkable fact that the daily delivery of milk and bread to Londoners, even in the bombed areas, was never interrupted; a tribute

both to the spirit of the workers and to the ingenuity of the managements in last-minute improvisations. For instance, London's milk mainly comes in by long-distance rail tank waggons that might, at short notice, have to halt at the outskirts and be reloaded into road tankers, which themselves might have to be diverted to unaccustomed bottling plants. Spare hand-prams or horse-drawn floats might have to be pressed into service for delivery, in place of vehicles damaged or immobilized, particularly for want of electricity to charge their batteries.

For emergency feeding, provision in London, as elsewhere, before September 1940 had been confined to the rest centers, which were run by the public assistance authority and whose menus, by Government prescription, had been assimilated to those of the casual wards (for tramps or hoboes) for which the same authority was responsible. It so happened, however, that during the summer of 1940 the Government had been considering the encouragement of "communal" feeding, by reviving the so-called National Kitchens that in World War I had served cheap meals to the poor. The Ministry of Food, though it held that its job was the provision of food, not of meals, had been prevailed upon to organize communal feeding through the local authorities; and it had already approached some of them before it was made aware that, under the existing law, these authorities had no power to act as caterers. (The prewar political climate had been unfavorable to all kinds of municipal trading, and any authority desiring to trade would have needed to promote—and successfully carry through—a private Act of Parliament.) The London County Council was the first to point out that special authorization would be required, and the Ministry of Food undertook to give it (4). Just then the bombs began to fall on London, and what had hitherto been regarded as a secondary aspect of communal feeding centers became primary—the provision of meals in emergency. The original welfare purpose of the centers remained an aim of Ministry policy, but their usefulness in air raids was put in the forefront of Ministry propaganda, particularly to reluctant municipalities in the provinces—an emphasis that in the event was not altogether fortunate, since it led to the establishment of fixed feeding centers when mobile centers would have provided better insurance against attack. The London County Council's *Londoners' Meals Service*, however, was mobile to begin with, in that centers were opened and closed, mainly in school buildings, as demand required; only toward the end of the period of heavy raids did the Council

begin to set up permanent installations of the kind that, outside London, became known as *British Restaurants*.

Meantime, other types of provision were being developed under fire. Before the war, it had not been thought that catering facilities in air-raid shelters would be necessary; raids had been expected to be, though sharp, short and mainly in daylight. Very early in the raids on London, however, numbers of people—few in comparison with the whole population but, absolutely, numerous, amounting to perhaps 350,000 at the peak of the raids—took to spending the night in public shelters in London. In defiance of Government instructions they invaded the deep Underground Railway stations—the safest public places in London—and the Government was constrained to change its policy and provide bunks on the platforms. Among the amenities that were required to prevent these shelters becoming squalid foci of infection, and to maintain their inhabitants' morale, feeding facilities were second only perhaps to sanitation. But the problem of providing them was intractable. Voluntary organizations, like the Salvation Army, did much, but their resources were limited. Mobile canteens outside shelters were unsafe during raids; yet the shelters themselves (other than the Underground) were seldom provided, at any rate at first, with gas, water, or electricity, all of which, moreover, might be put out of action without the shelter being hit. An attempt to enlist commercial caterers broke down because the fluctuation in the numbers of shelterers made it impossible for shelter feeding to pay its way or even to cover the costs of paid labor. The Ministry of Food therefore called upon the local authorities in the London Civil Defence Region to provide catering facilities in shelters; the Government undertook to reimburse financial losses, and set up a central pool of equipment on which authorities could draw. The London Passenger Transport Board undertook, with the aid of a grant from the Lord Mayor of London's air-raid distress fund, to run a refreshment service in the tube railway stations used as shelters. Subsequently the Ministry's Shelter Feeding Branch extended its persuasive activities to certain vulnerable provincial areas; but, partly owing to the reluctance of many local authorities, especially after air attacks had all but ceased, the shelter feeding program was not completed until the beginning of 1943. With rare exceptions these provincial schemes were never actually in operation.

Another type of emergency feeding device—the mobile canteen—was at first in the hands of voluntary organizations and local authorities, and began to be widely used as soon as the London raids

started. But—more particularly when raiding spread to the provinces—the Ministry of Food found it necessary to set up machinery, through its Divisional Food Officers, for registering and controlling this voluntary activity, so that overlapping of service on the one hand, and gaps in it on the other, might be avoided. In addition, the Ministry established what were called the *Queen's Messenger Convoys*—traveling field kitchens staffed by members of the Women's Voluntary Service for Civil Defence. These, under the direct control of the Divisional Food Office, constituted mobile reserves, independent of all public utility supplies, that could reinforce voluntary canteens in time of stress. Since the first vehicles for them were not delivered until March 1941, when the period of heavy raiding was nearly over, the convoys were given few opportunities of proving their worth; but when Merseyside was raided for a week on end, and many "static" emergency feeding centers were put out of action, six convoys were sent in and between them served over 400,000 portions of food. Convoys also did good service in the "Baedeker" raids of 1942—all the more so since these raids were on towns of no military importance that had not, therefore, taken elaborate emergency measures. Scattered attacks of this type, like that with flying bombs and rockets, both of which might fall anywhere over a large area, emphasized the need for mobility in emergency provision.

Canteens and convoys, though mobile, could only provide a very limited bill of fare; the public could not be expected to eat snacks, "Ministry soup," and simple stews for days on end. It was therefore decided to make the meals, rather than the kitchens, mobile, by setting up a network of *Cooking Depots* in the environs of large towns, into which they might deliver ready-cooked meals in insulated containers. The cooking depot program encountered numerous difficulties, the chief of which was that of finding suitable premises at strategic points seven to ten miles from the center of the town they were destined to serve; the full number of about 300 was not reached till May 1944. It had been intended that, instead of remaining idle except in emergency, cooking depots should be used for supplying meals to British Restaurants; but local authorities for the most part preferred to plan their restaurants as self-contained units, and the public preferred freshly cooked food. School children were not in a position to exercise this preference even if they had it; the rapid expansion of the school-meals scheme, under the auspices of the Education Departments, had often been hampered by the difficulty of cooking meals at the school, and the cooking depots provided a useful solution. By mid-1945, about half of them were being operated

by local education authorities for this purpose, though they would, of course, have still been available for emergency feeding had the need arisen. It is not clear, however, whether the arrangements for transporting the meals would have worked smoothly under strain, since the depots were never called upon to operate in the wake of an air raid. (London, the principal target of the flying bombs and rockets, had no depots, relying instead on the Londoners' Meals Service plus the canteens and convoys.) *Mobile* cooking depots, introduced by the Ministry of Food during 1943 to supplement the fixed cooking depots, were not popular with local authorities and were not used to any worth-while extent.

In retrospect it looks very much as if emergency meals provision outside London, and after mid-1941, had been overdone, not merely in relation to the attack that was actually experienced, but to any of which the enemy was capable. To provide for the simultaneous supply of meals to 10 percent of the population, or more than four million, was—at least so it seems to the writer—to concede to the German air force the possibility of gaining the air mastery it had failed, though by a narrow margin, to gain in 1940. It seems likely that the Government's service advisers were still, as before the war, overrating the effectiveness of large-scale bombing; after all, it was the weapon with which Bomber Command was hoping to defeat Germany. (So too, the Ministry of Food's anti-invasion precautions—which, since they were never tested in the event, will not be discussed in detail here—seem to have been out of all proportion to the actual risk of invasion, once Hitler had decided to attack Russia.) On the other hand, it is arguable that the overinsurance was only on paper, inasmuch as much of the provision was "static" and therefore not to be relied upon. What, in effect, the Ministry had done was to question the value of its earlier measures in static form, and to underwrite them by mobile feeding devices, but nevertheless to aggregate both types of provision in calculating the amount of cover it had. Certainly it would not be right to judge the emergency feeding program as if it had been conceived as a coherent whole; on the contrary, it consisted of a piling up of hasty though effective contrivances in the midst, and in the immediate aftermath, of the battle.

ATTACKS ON PROVINCIAL CITIES

Emergency feeding bulked larger in London than elsewhere because of the duration of the attacks and the unique problem of chronic shelter usage, even though, for reasons that have already

been given, the maintenance of normal food distribution was never beyond the ingenuity of London's traders. Elsewhere, though emergency feeding was frequently required more particularly because of the damage to gas, water, or electricity, it was rarely in operation for more than a day or two. (Bootle and Plymouth are exceptions.) The raids on provincial cities showed up weaknesses in this field, notably at Sheffield, where the rest centers were knocked out and the situation was largely saved by the use of discarded solid-fuel cookers in the poorhouse, which was on the outskirts of the city. They also repeatedly demonstrated the need for prompt intervention from outside to get distribution on its feet after a knockout blow, such as the notorious raid on Coventry. In that raid, the amount of food actually destroyed, or even damaged, was small, though some of it was under debris. But wholesale and retail distribution were paralyzed, whether by damage to buildings, the death or injury of key men, or simple shock; bread baking was impossible for lack of water, gas, and electricity, as was the processing and bottling of milk; the local Food Office was damaged and its records disordered. Many people had lost ration books and identity cards along with their homes, or were without retailers; hence statutory rationing had to be suspended until new documents, to the number of 20,000 (one-tenth of the population) could be issued. The Divisional Food Office at Birmingham immediately went into action and sent in a "breakdown gang" of officials; bread and milk were brought in large quantities from nearby cities; and canned corned beef was issued instead of fresh meat to those who could not cook the latter. Perhaps the most striking evidence of the restoration of order from chaos is to be found in the need (and the ability) to reinstate rationing after ten days because of the influx of sightseers who had heard of Coventry as a land of plenty.

The air raids, even when they were locally on this "saturation" scale, did not call for radical reforms in the system of controlled distribution. The Ministry of Food was concerned principally to ensure that the lessons of Coventry did not have to be learned afresh—whether by the local authority or in the Ministry's own district offices—in each town that might be raided. It devised a standard system of reporting for "incidents" affecting food interests to a central War Room at its Colwyn Bay headquarters; it arranged for the duplication of essential local food records, lest the Food Office be destroyed; it embodied the results of local experience, as they came to hand, in a continuous stream of emergency instructions to divisional

and local officers. It stimulated the bakery and milk trades in the provinces into active measures of mutual assistance, such as had already proved invaluable in London. During the long emergency lull in large-scale raids, from mid-1941 to early 1944, the emergency organization was kept under continual adjustment and overhaul, and stimulated by frequent defense exercises. An elaborate, perhaps overelaborate, system of emergency food dumps was established, chiefly to guard against the severance of normal distribution by small-scale enemy invasion. For a time the Ministry even maintained a carrier-pigeon loft at Colwyn Bay to serve in the event of a breakdown of communications. Hence when the flying bombs and rockets came, the Ministry took them in its stride.

Besides these mainly stimulant activities, there was one piece of fresh machinery that needed setting up—a food salvage organization. In the Government's prewar preparations, salvage had been unaccountably neglected, perhaps because air-raid devastation had been expected to be complete. There was, of course, an existing salvage corps, set up by the Fire Insurance Offices as a means of reducing their liabilities; there was also a Government-sponsored war-risks insurance, compulsory on all traders but the smallest. But the two had not been linked and the result was that, when the bombs began to fall on London in September 1940, it was nobody's business to save food (or any other goods) in damaged buildings, or to prevent it from further damage by weather. Those insured against war risks did not feel themselves obliged to take salvage measures, but sat back ready to collect the insurance money. Moreover, even had the peacetime salvage organization been from the first linked with war-risks insurance, neither its *tempo* nor its criteria would have been right for food under war conditions. There were too many "incidents" for each to undergo the insurance assessors' examination before salvage could proceed; not only was food too scarce for ordinary considerations of cost to be weighed, but it could not be allowed, by neglect, to escape into illicit channels. Finally, much of that in damaged warehouses in the Port of London was the Ministry of Food's property. The owners of a wrecked cold store might decline to spend money on clearing the debris away to get at the Ministry's meat underneath; but the Ministry could not therefore refuse to remove the meat before it became a public nuisance.

In November 1940, therefore, the Ministry's London Divisional Officer was authorized to set up his own salvage organization; and in January 1941 the organization was extended to the rest of the coun-

try, with headquarters at Colwyn Bay. Powers of requisition of privately owned damaged food were delegated to Divisional Food Officers; arrangements were made for the reconditioning of food, and more particularly for drying grain and oilseeds soaked by firefighters' water (by far the worst single cause of damage); and an orderly system of disposal, especially for food that could not be made fit for human consumption, was established. This was all the more important since February 1941 saw the beginning of animal-feed rationing, the credit of which might have been undermined at the outset if large quantities of damaged grain had set up a black market. (Damaged flour was a principal ingredient in dog biscuits for the remainder of the war.) The results were rewarding; 250,000 tons of food were recovered in the months January–May 1941 alone. Indeed, food proved to be very difficult to destroy; about four-fifths of that affected by enemy action was recovered, on the average, after the setting up of the salvage organization. The losses from air raids, in any event unexpectedly small, were thereby reduced to negligible dimensions; and could scarcely have been crippling, even if heavy raiding had continued after May 1941.

By contrast, air-raid damage to processing plant was far more serious; by May 1941 the United Kingdom had lost some 13 percent of flour milling capacity, and in addition there had been numerous temporary stoppages. Flour consumption had gone up, compared with prewar, by about one-fifth—completely wiping out the previous excess capacity—and unrestricted supplies were only maintained by working three instead of the normal two shifts at the remaining mills. In February and March 1941, the Ministry of Food was all but constrained, on this ground alone, to raise the rate of flour extraction to 85 percent—and must have done so, had raids continued. (It is true that, in theory, further losses could have been offset by importing more flour; but increased flour imports would have reduced the rate of ships' turnaround at a time when it needed to be accelerated. This problem of milling capacity is one of the most intractable facing the United Kingdom in a modern war.) Damage to sugar refineries, crushing mills, and cold stores was also serious, though less so than that to flour mills; of the two principal margarine factories, on the Thames and Mersey estuaries respectively, the former was out of action for weeks at a time, but fortunately production could be made good at the other. The margin of safety in edible oils was low, for although a new hydrogenation plant for whale oil had been set up at Dowlais, in South Wales, there was

not much surplus refining capacity, and much of it was vulnerably situated.

Although, therefore, attention at the time was largely concentrated on the immediate effects of air raids—on emergency feeding and the restoration of bread and milk supplies, for instance—the undramatic, attritive aspect of the raids constituted a more fundamental threat to national safety. The creeping paralysis that threatened the railway network from air raids on London, at a time when diversion of ships to the western ports put a heavy strain on all internal transport, required as energetic remedy as the shock of the raids themselves. In this field the Ministry of Food's Transport Division set a shining example of preparedness, that at the time won less recognition than it deserved.

BRITISH RESTAURANTS

The provision, by local authorities at the Government's instance, of what, thanks to a happy inspiration of Mr. Churchill, were generally known as *British Restaurants*, but were originally thought of as *National Kitchens* or *Community Feeding Centres*, became so tied up with "emergency" feeding that it may well be discussed here. Like so much else, it derived from experiment in the earlier period of control, when National Kitchens had been set up in a number of large cities, partly to help the poor get cheap nourishing meals, partly it seems to set an example in Food Economy. When, in 1939/40, the rise in food prices caused the Government to consider measures of assistance to the poor, communal feeding centers were advocated as a solution to the problem. Labour Party members of the Churchill Government more particularly pressed for the provision of canteens, not only in factories and schools, but also for those of the general public who could not afford commercial caterers' prices. Responsibility for the two former classes rested with the Ministry of Labour and the Board of Education respectively; the Ministry of Food's part was limited to seeing that food was made available for them. Its officials, to begin with, were very reluctant to take on the third—catering, they argued, was not their business—and only under pressure did the Ministry agree to open one or two experimental National Kitchens. Lord Woolton himself, though his philanthropic bent made him more enthusiastic for communal feeding in principle, was no less cautious about accepting direct responsibility for it; he felt that local authorities were the right people for the job. However, he had barely started approaching them when, with the first heavy

raids on London, some sort of communal feeding became necessary merely as an emergency measure.

The usefulness in air raids of the London County Council's newly established civic restaurants was henceforth to become a main plank supporting the Ministry's advocacy of British Restaurants; at the same time, the "relief" aspect of their work tended to be pushed into the background by wider and more ambitious considerations. There were advocates of communal feeding who regarded it as having almost a moral value, denied to meals taken in the privacy of the home; there were others who looked to it as a means of improving the diet of the masses, or even as a universal resort that might be necessary to ensure that restricted supplies of food were used to the best advantage. "If," ran a letter from Lord Woolton to civic heads in November 1940, urging the establishment of communal feeding centers, "every man, woman, and child could be sure of obtaining at least one hot nourishing meal a day, at a price all could afford, we should be sure of the nation's health and strength during the war. . . ."

These ambitions had no relation either to the attitude of the public, most of whom would prefer to eat at home given the chance to do so, or to the practical limits set by shortages of labor and materials to setting up new restaurants, State or other. In practice, communal feeding was acceptable only if it were limited to an extent that did not mean an inroad into domestic rations. Otherwise there must have come a time when, to conserve equity, meals in catering establishments must have been rationed—a proposal that, apart from its administrative difficulty, would if successful almost certainly reduce the amount of "eating out." Yet the British Restaurant movement, in the dimensions it actually attained, was probably a bulwark of the policy of leaving meals free of coupon; the sting was taken out of the privilege by the fact that it was not confined to the rich. So, too, the development of industrial canteens enabled the Ministry to evade the problems of differential domestic rations (except for the period of bread rationing, after the war) and to meet the requirements of heavy workers by providing additional supplies of food for their canteens—supplies that, incidentally, were not always taken up in full.

Realization that British Restaurants could, and must continue to, play but a small part in feeding the masses was slow in coming. When the thousandth restaurant was opened in September 1941 there was talk of ten thousand as the goal. (By a coincidence, this

was the same figure that had been vainly hoped for by the Director of National Kitchens in 1917.) Already at that time, however, the Ministry of Food was encountering apathy in local authorities, particularly those not obviously threatened by air raids, and growing opposition from the commercial caterers, who had to be given assurances that, so far from seeking to put them out of business, the Government only wanted to fill gaps in the provision of meals. They were told, truly but perhaps not convincingly, that British Restaurants enjoyed no privileges (5) in the supply of controlled foods. (However, they were for a time included, with school canteens, in a special priority scheme for supplies of unrationed foods like cocoa, starch food powders, and coffee "essence," for which they could not qualify by reason of past performance.)

Had not the possibilities of British Restaurants been set so high, there might have been more opposition to the establishment of the elaborate machine, both at Headquarters and in the Regions, that the Ministry of Food found necessary to deal with them. That such a machine remained necessary, in spite of the comparatively small scale of British Restaurant provision, was due to the inexperience of most of Lord Woolton's chosen vessels, the local authorities, in catering matters, and to the heavy financial commitments that the Ministry of Food was obliged to undertake in order to get communal feeding facilities provided at all. Initially it had been supposed in the Ministry that capital costs would be slight, and feeding centers mainly self-supporting; but the London County Council, more experienced in such matters, had insisted on a Government guaranty against operating losses before it would start the *Londoners' Meals Service*. The Ministry was shortly constrained to offer local authorities reimbursement both of approved capital expenditure and of "approved operating deficiencies"—a somewhat vague phrase that in practice was interpreted to mean losses neither deliberately incurred by an overgenerous price policy, nor due to obviously incompetent management by the local authority. With financial responsibility went, inevitably, overriding administrative responsibility; projects had to be scrutinized and approved, advice and help given in the procurement of equipment, catering standards supervised. As the Government's stake in the movement grew, increasing emphasis was laid on the principle that British Restaurants should be self-supporting; proposals for establishing small restaurants in rural or semirural areas were watched with especial care, and it was even suggested that some local authorities had been overzealous in

responding to the Minister's original appeal. (This had been sent to every "sanitary authority," including the rural district councils and small Scottish burghs.) So, too, the Ministry of Food resisted pressure from other Departments, more particularly the Ministry of Labour, that it should open British Restaurants for the benefit of war workers even where there could be no reasonable expectation that they would pay their way.

The peak of the British Restaurant movement was reached in September 1943, when there were 2,160 in operation, serving an average of 600,000 meals a day; about 300 of these were not taking advantage of the Ministry of Food financial guaranties. By the beginning of 1945 the number had fallen to 1,900, and a year later to 1,400. In 1946 the Ministry of Food sponsored the *Civic Restaurants Act*, which replaced the wartime enactment under which the local authorities had been given powers to open restaurants. This ended the Government's financial responsibility for the movement; local authorities might take over existing restaurants, but if the trading accounts should show a loss in three successive years, the Ministry might order the restaurant in question to be closed. Only about 300 local authorities, or less than one-half of those operating in 1943, chose to exercise their rights under the Act; the 850 restaurants working on April 1, 1947, when it came into operation, had declined to 678 by February 1949, and fell still further when the initial three years was up. It remains to be seen whether the decline will be checked short of vanishing point (6).

The avowed purpose of the British Restaurant was to provide a midday meal, and this proved to be its principal function; attempts to supply breakfasts, teas, and suppers met with comparatively little response. It was a convenience—resorted to because war conditions did not favor home eating—that never developed, as some enthusiasts thought it might, into a social habit. This was not because British Restaurant meals were, by the standards of the time, unattractive (except where they were sent in from cooking depots some distance away); the premises, though often improvised, were generally bright, comparing favorably with commercial restaurants in the same price class. A Canadian enquirer, writing as early as 1944 (5), concluded that British Restaurants would lose ground when peace was restored. Except where journeys from home to work are long, meals at home are, claimed this observer, cheaper as well as better than those in the best communal restaurant; a statement for which he was much criticized at the time, but which appears to be not far off the mark. The

writer would add, merely as a personal opinion, that the novelty and fresh paint of the restaurants, like the high popularity of the Ministry of Food in Lord Woolton's day, were bound to wear off, and that thereafter their all-too-ready adaptation to the purposes of Ministry of Food propaganda may have become a handicap.

This is not necessarily to say that the £1 million net that was spent on them was unjustified. It is true that their contribution to the better feeding of the masses in wartime, that is to say the original purpose, apart from emergency feeding, for which they were intended, was limited and uncertain. Nor can it be said with any confidence—though it was often said at the time—that they markedly raised the culinary standards of the popular eating place; though the limiting factors were shortage of food and of skilled cooks, and public resistance to innovation, rather than want of enthusiasm in the Ministry. The eating habits of the British at no time lend themselves to enterprise in the provision of menus. Given these limitations, however, British Restaurants did an honest, useful job in serving simple meals at a reasonable price; they provided a yardstick by which commercial caterers could be judged, a useful recourse in emergency, and a safety valve for the discontent that might otherwise have been aroused by the freedom of restaurant meals from the coupon.

CITATIONS

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2 Quoted in R. J. Hammond, *Food: The Growth of Policy* (History of the Second World War, U.K. Civil Series, H.M.S.O., 1951), Appendix A.

3 W. K. Hancock and M. M. Gowing, *British War Economy* (History of the Second World War, U.K. Civil Series, H.M.S.O., 1949).

4 It was rather belatedly given by *S.R.&O.* 1941, No. 103.

5 For the financial privileges they did enjoy, see Gordon Taylor, "The Future of British Restaurants," *Agenda* (London), Vol. III, No. 2.

6 Gilbert Sugden, "The Finance of Civic Restaurants," *Local Government Finance* (London), October 1949.

CHAPTER 10

OVERSEAS SUPPLIES AND STOCKS, 1942-45

IMPORT STRINGENCIES AND THE FLOUR EXTRACTION RATE

There was never again to be during the war a crisis in imported supplies of the kind that occurred in 1940/41; nor in stocks, like that for wheat in November 1939. The improvement that the summer of 1941 brought, with the honeymoon period of Lend-Lease, was in course of being halted even before Pearl Harbor; and the eighteen months after Pearl Harbor were, military defeats quite apart, the period when the enemy's sea blockade of the United Kingdom enjoyed its greatest successes. Throughout the winter of 1942/43 the rate of loss of food cargoes bound thither was running at 9 percent, a crippling rate; and hardly had the submarine been mastered when the procurement of supplies overseas, hitherto a matter of ships and money, began to be menaced by the growing world food shortage. Yet for the average British household, supplies of the basic foods remained almost unchanged, and, above all, bread remained unrationed. It was a period of stringency, but of planned stringency that applied the screw to food consumption in a deliberate and calculating way. The stability of supplies was precarious, and depended, in the last resort, on the enlightened self-interest embodied in Lend-Lease; but it also depended on the qualities of the mature British food-control machine.

The Ministry of Food had technical ingenuity in plenty. This secured, for instance, the maintenance of meat imports through the boning and telescoping of carcasses before they were put into scarce refrigerated shipping space, and promoted such "ship saving" devices as the production of dried eggs and dried milk on a large scale in the United States. The Ministry also had administrative ingenuity that went far to secure the conservation of food supplies and their fair distribution. But these types of ingenuity had to be backed up by a kind of specialist diplomacy in food matters, of which the most skilled exponents were the British Food Mission in Washington. It was they who, after Pearl Harbor had shifted the focus of Allied activity to the United States, had to make out a case for sustaining British levels of food consumption, and to convince the Allies that

British drafts on the free-world's supplies of food, and the shipping to move them, were reasonable. The Ministry of Food itself had to beat off the disciples of further austerity at home. Success in these aims, moreover, was later to recoil on its own head in the shape of increasing criticism of the level to which, aided by good fortune, it had succeeded in raising stocks of food in the United Kingdom.

At the time of Pearl Harbor there was still one obvious major measure of conservation that had not been adopted: bread was still white, if not quite so white as it had been before the war. (The extraction rate for wheat was now 76 percent instead of about 70 percent.) This policy had been persisted in, despite strong advocacy of high-extraction flour by the medical profession, mainly because "war bread" had been unpopular in 1917; instead, the Government had begun fortifying the standard straight-run flour with synthetic vitamin B₁. Fortification was denounced by the advocates of compulsory "wheatmeal" as a surrender to the milling interests (who like the milk distributors enjoy among food reformers a kind of sinister eminence), and it aroused much emotion among the disciples of "natural" foods; but there can be no doubt at all that it was the only measure of bread improvement that appealed to the general public. That this was still true in wartime is shown by the Ministry's effort to popularize a loaf made from 85 percent extraction flour ("National Wheatmeal"); after a year of propaganda it accounted for less than 5 percent of total consumption, although, unlike proprietary brown breads, it was sold at the same price as white bread. But there was another, more powerful, reason against raising the extraction rate until one had to—namely, the loss of animal feedstuffs that it would entail. There were those who argued that the effect on milk supplies would offset any gain from more nutritious bread (1).

It would not be to the purpose to try to form an opinion on the nutritional merits of the case, though it must be remarked that some of the arguments used by the opponents of fortification partook, and partake, more of the character of religious belief than of scientific evidence (2). (It is of some sociological interest that some of the most ardent of them were Peers.) At any rate, the Ministry of Food felt able throughout 1941 to resist the very vocal but in no way popular agitation in favor of higher-extraction flour. Even before Pearl Harbor, however, it was becoming anxious about the fall in wheat shipments that autumn and the future trend of stocks; and by mid-January 1942 it was arguing—partly as a result of a gross underestimate of what could be expected from the remainder of the

home crop—that the extraction rate would have to go up to 85 percent unless more ships could be procured for carrying wheat. Since this alternative was, with every week that passed, more and more out of the question, there was in fact no option; and after some heart searching the rate was raised, at the end of March 1942.

Though the Ministry of Food's abandonment of the position it had long taken was the result of anxiety due to miscalculation, one may doubt whether, given the critical war situation, it could have held that position much longer. Indeed, scarcely had the new rate come into operation than the Ministry was pressed to save shipping by other measures. A further rise in the extraction rate was objected to by the Government's advisers on nutrition, 85 percent flour being regarded as the best compromise between economy, intrinsic food value, and digestibility. Taking barley from beer and putting it into bread was rejected because a greater shortage of beer than already existed, thanks to the pegging of output at the 1938/39 level, would be highly unpopular. (Output had been pegged in terms of "standard" barrels of a notional gravity. "Bulk" barrelage had been increased by the addition, with Government consent and approval, of water; hence the jocular description of the increased beer duty as the "highest water-rate in history.")

Instead, the Government pinned its faith for a time to an expedient that was, in fact, an *ignis fatuus*—namely, the "dilution" of bread with potato flour. The idea that this is practicable on a worthwhile scale appears to be a recurrent feature of wartime food policy in Britain; it has been noted earlier as contributing to the enthusiasm for growing more and more potatoes. As everyone who has baked bread at home probably knows, cooked mashed potato can be used as an ingredient of the dough. In 1918, the Ministry of Food had sponsored a largely abortive campaign, through local Food Committees, to get bakers to use surplus potatoes in this way. For some reason the campaign made an altogether false and lasting impression on contemporaries—so much so that Beveridge, ten years later, could write that but for the Armistice, the bread of 1919 would have consisted "largely" of potatoes (3, p. 98).

The truth was far otherwise, because potatoes are so full of water. To add them to flour up to the equivalent of two percent, the figure discussed in the summer of 1942, called for 500,000 tons, equivalent to 100,000 tons of wheat, or less than a week's consumption. At no time during the war (after the end of 1939) was a week's consumption of wheat significant in terms of the country's stocks; but the

Ministry of Food's tenacious stock policy drove it, in effect, to aver otherwise and therefore to take seriously expedients of this sort. There then arose, however, two objections. The one, of which more was made at the time, was technical. There were no factories capable of producing potato flour on the required scale, but a crude sort of flour could be produced by crushing the dried potato slices ("cossettes") that were made in the beet-sugar factories in their off season. Great store was set by this discovery for many months; it was not until the autumn of 1942 that the process was found to be unduly difficult and the product to contain too much sulphur dioxide. More fundamental, however, was the second objection: there could be no guaranty that the potatoes would be available when the time came, whatever the size of the crop. It was, therefore, impossible to rely on potatoes for a *planned* dilution of bread, such as would enable an economy to be made in the advance allocation of ships for wheat. In October 1942 the potato flour scheme was allowed to drop.

That spring, when dilution was first mooted, the only alternative diluent had been oats; and it was largely because there seemed little likelihood of getting enough oats off farms without requisitioning them—and thereby upsetting the whole policy of self-sufficiency in feedstuffs—that the Government had been sidetracked, for a whole six months, into taking potato flour seriously. Now, however, a wind-fall appeared in the shape of an exceptionally good barley harvest. Barley, unlike oats, is mainly a cash crop and could therefore be secured comparatively easily; moreover, it is a much better diluent, technically speaking, than oats, standing a higher rate of extraction and, in small proportions, having little effect on loaf quality. Oats would still be needed to make up the full equivalent of the wheat saving desired, but not in a quantity that would call for requisitioning.

BREAD "DILUTION" AND THE "AUSTERITY" POLICY

There were still, however, practical obstacles to delay the fact of dilution, arising mainly from the Ministry of Food's insistence that the "national" loaf should be uniform and as high in quality as possible. Dilution might not begin, therefore, until an appointed day when every flour miller should have supplies of diluent grains; and, before oats was used, special machines for removing the husk had to be ordered (with Treasury sanction), procured, and installed in the mills. Furthermore, there was a question of priorities when it came to purchasing the grain; the Ministry was not willing to trench, even temporarily, on supplies of barley for malting, or of oats for

oatmeal millers and town horses. It was not, therefore, until January 1, 1943, that dilution, to the extent of five percent of the grist, was actually started. By then the shipping position looked so black that a 10 percent dilution appeared necessary; and again technical resource was called in to avoid what otherwise seemed inevitable—namely, a reduction in beer output through the withdrawal of barley from the brewers. Instead, they were persuaded to substitute flaked oats for flaked barley, to the extent of 10 percent of their total usage; and this was achieved by July 1943. (It was also suggested that the potato cossettes should be used in beer; but brewing technicians rejected this on the ground that they made the beer cloudy. If only the same trouble could have been taken about the eating quality of other wartime foods!) Meanwhile, the sudden improvement in the shipping situation in the spring of 1943 had caused the whole policy of dilution to come under review, more especially as, despite all precautions, even the three percent addition of oats to the grist had resulted in a marked deterioration in the baking qualities of the national flour. The Ministry of Food had just resolved to discontinue the use of oats when reports of the 1943 harvest indicated that there would not be enough, even so, to give the brewers a replacement of the barley they had surrendered to bread. At the end of November 1943, therefore, the grist was allowed to revert to all-wheat, except for a minute local addition of rye.

In effect, therefore, taking into account the low rate of extraction from oats (about 40 percent) and the short time during which the diversion of barley from beer was in full operation, the main saving of wheat imports arose from the fact of casual barley surplus from an exceptionally abundant crop. The elaborate and costly jugglery with oats accounted for but three days of wheat supplies. It may be said that this derisory result only came about because the shipping crisis passed. But the whole of the Government's policy, ever since the United States entered the war, had been based on just the expectation that, thanks to the effort in the American shipyards, the worst would be over by mid-1943. The oats project, like the potato flour project, was too cumbersome to serve as the temporary but prompt expedient that the occasion required. It is not surprising that when, in 1946, another crisis in breadstuffs supplies loomed up, the Ministry of Food should have preferred increased extraction and even rationing.

To judge dilution merely on its merits as an expedient to save shipping may, however, be taking too simple a view. This was the

period when the word "austerity" first came into fashion among politicians, the Press, and Government departments. Whereas in 1939/40 a measure of food restriction, be it of proven utility, had to fight for acceptance, in 1942/43 there were many, though the Prime Minister was never among them, for whom discomfort was a sort of moral duty incumbent on all. One might array the acts of food policy during this year according to their relative material and moral content, beginning with the adoption of 85 percent flour and ending with the restrictions on the extent and price of restaurant meals, the placing of bottled mussels "on points," and the price controls on goat meat and smoked salmon. That there were arguments of expediency to be urged even for these last goes without saying; it is rare in modern economic administration for an ethical motive to appear naked, so to speak.

Moreover, there were other proposals as deserving in themselves that failed to be adopted wholly or mainly on account of their administrative difficulty. These were the rationing of bread and of restaurant meals. For the latter, indeed, the Ministry of Food got as far as procuring 200 million plastic tokens, each to be worth one or more main meals, and contrived a plan whereby these tokens were to be issued to consumers in exchange for points or meat coupons. Administratively ingenious, the plan was innocent of economic sophistication, and it was well for the reputation of the Ministry that the shipping situation improved before it could be put into operation. (Its exchange feature was to recur in the newly improvised bread rationing scheme of 1946.)

It would not be to the purpose to compile here a ranking list of the kind, if only because the position of individual items must depend so much upon personal opinion. Thus the prohibition of ice cream, defended by the Ministry of Food on the ground that it saved transport, brought a rebuke from Mr. Churchill because the War Cabinet had not been consulted beforehand (*I*, pp. 899-900); he was later to include it among examples of "self-strafting." Actually it worked only through the consent of the large and reputable manufacturers, since no satisfactory legal definition of ice cream could be found; only the *name* was really prohibited. The important point to grasp is that the adoption of "wheatmeal" bread was the last significant economy that could be made in imported food, short of what officials generally referred to as "siege conditions," i.e., those in which neither thought for the future nor the preservation of (at any rate, the semblance of) a civilized diet, had any place.

In this matter of preserving a certain variety of diet, Lend-Lease shipments were invaluable—how much so, the public hardly realized until they had ended. Canned pork shoulder meat (a complete novelty to British consumers), canned fish, canned milk, dried egg, dried fruit, were all, in greater or less degree, esthetically desirable apart from their food value. A nation possessed of a more resourceful culinary tradition, and perhaps less completely mobilized for "war work" than Britain after 1942, would have contrived more palatable meals from the ingredients that still remained available. Gastronomically speaking, nothing could be more pathetic than the efforts of the Ministry of Food to devise, out of potatoes, dried egg, salt cod, and the like, "Victory Dishes" whose delights were extolled in terms to make a commercial advertiser blush. The monotony of British wartime diet was partly due to the retention of the form of prewar dishes without their substance, much as a food crank will eat "nut roasts" or drink "dandelion coffee." (It was in an effort to ease this monotony that the Ministry was at pains to keep going the manufacture of bottled ready-made pickles and sauces, the traditional accompaniments for cold meat and fried fish.) However, the austere fare served up, for instance by the average caterer, may have had its advantages when it came to persuading skeptical Allies of the need to keep up British consumption. Contrariwise, references in the Hearst Press to the continuance of "luxury feeding" in London hotels and restaurants were admittedly largely responsible for the legislation (5) that limited the prices to be charged and the number of courses that might be served.

CONTROVERSY OVER STOCK LEVELS

The focus of inter-Allied discussion about consumption levels was, of course, the Combined Food Board, a full account of whose activities belongs to another volume in this series. The process of recommending international allocation of scarce foods under its auspices was in the first instance a corollary of the Anglo-American decision, for which the practice of the Allies in 1918 and the short-lived Anglo-French Food Executive of 1939 were precedents, to eschew competitive buying in the world markets, notably for oils and fats, sugar, and meat. In the early months of the Board's existence, emphasis had been less on supply than on shipping; even so, one of the conditions of the large-scale switch of meat supplies proposed in the autumn of 1942 (by which United Kingdom needs were to be met from the United States, which would in its turn draw sup-

plies for its armed forces from Australia and New Zealand) had been that the British meat ration should not be increased. Actually, because of rationing difficulties, the United States found itself unable to carry out its commitments in full, and the British had to draw on stocks of canned corned beef to eke out the ration. This was symptomatic of what was to come, for it provoked the first serious attempt by American officials to question British statements of food requirements. (In the honeymoon period after the passing of the Lend-Lease Act, the Ministry of Food had found United States generosity almost embarrassing.) There followed the series of Anglo-American-Canadian Consumption Levels Inquiries (6) which, though they elicited much that is interesting about consumption trends in the three countries, should always be treated as documents of diplomacy rather than of science. Partly no doubt because the American and Canadian participants investigated British conditions on the spot, instead of relying merely on statistical information, the first Inquiry, whose results were published in April 1944, decisively established the inferiority of the United Kingdom's food position to that of her suppliers.

Thereafter the main bone of contention at the Combined Food Board became the level of United Kingdom food stocks and the extent to which they might be used in aid of postwar shortages, the likely dimensions of which were themselves a matter for debate. Until the United Kingdom Government relaxes its present ban on the publication of stock figures for individual commodities (which were, of course, fully disclosed to the other members of the C.F.B.) in time-series, discussion of this very important matter must be confined to generalities. Total "bulk" stocks of food—i.e., those under the control of the Ministry of Food—have been published (7, p. 397, Table X) for the war years, quarter by quarter, from March 1940. The critical year, from the present point of view, was 1943, when stocks rose by more than 2 million tons to a peak of 6.7 million, compared with about 2.5 million before the war. This had been accomplished on total imports, over the year, of less than 12 million tons; and so great was the pressure on storage space that quantities of raw sugar and oilseeds had to be put in the open, under tarpaulins.

To a considerable extent this spectacular rise had been due to the record harvest of 1943. Imports, too, had from May onward exceeded all expectations, largely because of the sharp decline in marine losses, which, having been 9.3 percent (of total arrivals *plus*

losses) in the first quarter, fell to .6 percent in the last. At first sight one might suppose that this would only benefit stocks of those commodities, like wheat, that were not yet subject to C.F.B. allocation, but this was not so. In the first place, the Ministry of Food made a sinkings allowance in its import programing and its claims at the Combined Food Board. Second, for one very important commodity, oilseeds, the U.K. "sphere of influence" was virtually self-sufficing and the U.K. annual allocation in practice a residuary legacy. Moreover, unlike the North Atlantic, the inward West African run always seems to have had a sufficiency of ships.

As, therefore, the war dragged on and the prospects of large demands for food from both Europe and the Far East became more menacing, United States officials naturally looked to the huge British stocks, built up to some small extent out of Lend-Lease supplies, as a way out of their troubles. Once Germany was defeated (they argued), the United Kingdom could and should reduce stocks by two or three million tons. The British for their part agreed that some contribution was possible; but they were able to find a number of reasons why their stocks should not, even after a Japanese defeat, be reduced to anything like the prewar level. The most important of these—that large stocks would be a protection against the postwar world food shortage that the Ministry of Food had been predicting from early 1943 onward—was not one of which much could be made in negotiations with the Allies, particularly at the Combined Food Board whose declared purpose was the fair sharing of burdens. Reliance was mainly laid upon technical considerations, which may be summed up in the phrase, "the need to maintain distribution." This does not imply a conscious effort to deceive the critics of overhigh stock levels. The generality of Ministry of Food officials undoubtedly believed in the substantial merits of their case. Indeed, they applied it to their own consumption policy, rigorously refusing, for example, to reduce the rate of flour extraction by even 5 percent until January 1945, and rationing bread in 1946 in order to prevent wheat stocks from falling below what was held to be a danger level. It follows that the critic must treat the arguments they used strictly on their merits.

The writer has analyzed these in detail in the official history of food policy (1, pp. 273 ff.) and need not repeat that process here. In theory, what the Ministry of Food called, after 1943, the *minimum prudent level* of stocks for a given commodity was established by adding a safety margin, computed in terms of the weighted average

voyage time, to a figure, in terms of weeks' supply, representing the *minimum working stock* necessary to maintain steady distribution under "normal" wartime conditions. (Abnormalities, such as heavy air raids or unusually high sinkings, were provided for by an additional "General Food Reserve.") In practice, this process was open to several inflationary influences. Commodity Directors would claim, for instance, that they must always have at the firsthand stage of distribution stocks equal to at least the number of weeks' supply allocated to the trade at any one time, irrespective of the amount that might be in the pipeline between the ship and the firsthand distributor. For foods of which there was a substantial home-grown supply, such as wheat, sugar, and meat, the minimum stocks were nevertheless calculated in terms of *total* consumption, and not consumption of imported supplies; however, this process was not taken to its logical conclusion in the form of a minimum working stock for, say, potatoes or carrots. The calculations for each food took no account of the actual stock levels of other foods that might serve as substitutes for it—canned meat and canned fish, for example.

Finally, for the most important food of all, wheat, the Commodity Director flatly refused to accept the formula because it gave, even so, an unacceptable result, and substituted instead a figure professing to be based on expert advice, but ultimately derived from a War Cabinet ruling of 1917 that had, in practice, remained little more than an aspiration (8). This had laid down thirteen weeks' supply of wheat and flour as a desirable minimum stock level; and in December 1939 it had been reiterated by Mr. Chamberlain's War Cabinet, at the Minister of Food's proposal. Thereafter, in the hands of the Ministry's Cereals Division, what had originally been an objective to be reached from below became gradually transmuted into a danger line, below which stocks must on no account be allowed to fall. It followed that a further margin was required to be added to the thirteen weeks' stock figure, before a minimum prudent level could be laid down.

Neglecting various refinements that crept into the calculations each time they were reworked on this or that occasion, one may express the effect of this process as follows. After the rate of extraction had been increased from 73 to 85 percent; after the amount of wheat home produced, in terms of that imported, had risen from one-third to equality; and when the rate of sinkings had fallen to less than one percent of loadings, the Ministry of Food claimed to require about three weeks' supplies more, for prudence sake, than it claimed in

1939, or a margin above the minimum equivalent to the whole of the stocks of wheat available to millers in November 1939, when indeed some east coast mills had been stopped for a short time for lack of grist, owing to the diversion of ships to the west. The 20 percent increase in flour consumption since then was a comparatively small offset to the enhancement by at least 100 percent of the minimum stock requirement on which to base policy.

The phenomenon is analogous to that observed by J. S. Davis, writing of the International Wheat Agreement of 1942, when he described the minimum stock levels as "needlessly, burdensomely high" (9). Perhaps it is a necessary result of State interference in such matters; but it ought not, in the instance under discussion here, to be put down to the unwillingness of politicians or civil servants to take reasonable commercial risks. Responsibility for the Ministry of Food's stock policy rested in practice not on these, but on leaders of the trades recruited for wartime purposes. As traders on Government account, the Ministry's commodity directors took no financial risk by holding heavy stocks, nor did they bear carrying charges. On the other hand, they were answerable personally to the Minister for maintaining supplies; and that fact was not only a standing invitation to play for safety, but also a reason why neither Minister nor War Cabinet could lightly override their advice. The scales were, therefore, weighted in favor of a cautious stock policy, which was no bad thing in itself. What was unfortunate, though perhaps inevitable, was that a very proper determination to maintain and increase stocks did not yield the dividends, in terms of freedom from anxiety and flexibility in action, that it should have yielded. On the contrary, the Ministry of Food developed, in the later years of war, a species of stocks hypochondria that made itself felt, for instance, throughout its negotiations about immediate supplies for civilian relief in Europe. (Nevertheless it must be acknowledged that the United Kingdom did make available one million tons of food for Europe before the end of 1945.) Moreover, although the British secured, in each of the repeated Anglo-American arguments about stock levels, substantial acceptance of their point of view, they did not *convince* their Allies. It is harder than some have supposed to judge whether the ponderable advantages of having the extra stocks at hand outweighed, or were outweighed by, the imponderables of suspicion and mistrust that the policy aroused. The Ministry of Food's Commodity Directors would one and all have plumped for the former view.

The stocks controversy but reflects the reservations that any sovereign state will make about a body like the Combined Food Board. Any national Minister of Food, however much he subscribe to the principle of fair allocation of resources, will be bound to put first those for and to whom he is responsible. The United Kingdom's genuine desire that there should be fair shares all round was modified by a conviction that the United Kingdom share ought to be fairer (if one may so put it) than that of the other European Allies; the desire to co-operate with the United States constantly warred with a wish to reinsure, somehow or other, the British position against the unaccountable vagaries of American policy. Hence the constant effort to restrict the membership of the Combined Food Board, and at the same time, to maintain the Board's "authority" vis-à-vis other international bodies such as UNRRA and the International Wheat Council. There were, of course, good solid reasons that could be urged to members of the Grand Alliance in support of this policy. But at bottom it was one of self-interest—enlightened, maybe, but impossible to disguise; and as such it had the character of a stubborn retreat covered by repeated rearguard actions. Magnanimity is seldom possible except for the strong; the American feeling, expressed for instance during the international wheat negotiations of 1942, that contrasted the bold and generous gesture of Lend-Lease with the British haggling over postwar wheat prices, failed to make allowance for the economic weakness that made postwar wheat prices matter to the United Kingdom.

Whether or not one's admiration for the tenacity and skill of British food diplomacy is tempered by the belief that wisdom may sometimes lie in the prompt abandonment of morally vulnerable positions is, in the last resort, a matter of personal judgment. What is beyond doubt is that one cannot fight a world food shortage with diplomatic weapons; and it was the fact of world shortage that, in the end, forced the United Kingdom to retreat. Once the fighting was over, the British claim to favorable treatment, on the ground that their people must be kept fighting fit, lost its main plank of support. Armistice in Europe had perforce to be celebrated, in Britain, by what Lord Woolton's successor, Colonel Llewellyn, called "a cut in our already meagre and dull standards of consumption" (7, p. 254); reductions in sugar and fats allocations to manufacturers, in the bacon ration (by 25 percent), and in the soap ration. A year later, the end of the Combined Food Board and its replacement by an International Emergency Food Council on which all the United

Nations might claim to be represented, aptly though accidentally coincided with the end of the outstanding distinction between the United Kingdom and other European belligerents; in July 1946 bread and flour were rationed. (See chapter 12.)

CITATIONS

- 1 Norman C. Wright, "Wheatmeal Bread or Milk?" *Chemistry and Industry* (London), Vol. 60, 1941, pp. 623-27.
- 2 This appears not only in the work of such extremists as L. J. Picton (*Thoughts on Feeding*, London, 1946), but creeps even into official inquiries like the *Report of the Departmental Committee on the Post-War Loaf* (H.M.S.O., 1945).
- 3 Sir William H. Beveridge, *British Food Control* (London, 1928).
- 4 W. S. Churchill, *The Second World War: IV, The Hinge of Fate* (Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston, 1950).
- 5 Principally by S.R.&O. 1942, No. 909.
- 6 *Food Consumption Levels in the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom*, First, Second, and Third Reports of a Special Joint Committee set up by the Combined Food Board (issued by U.S.D.A., W.F.A., April and December 1944 and February 1946).
- 7 R. J. Hammond, *Food: The Growth of Policy* (History of the Second World War, U.K. Civil Series, H.M.S.O., 1951).
- 8 See Sir William Ashley's discussion appended (pp. 205 ff.) to the *Final Report of the Agricultural Tribunal of Investigation* (Command Paper, series Cmd. 2145, H.M.S.O., 1924; in *Parliamentary Papers*, 1924, VII).
- 9 J. S. Davis, "New International Wheat Agreements," *Wheat Studies of the Food Research Institute* (Stanford University, Calif.), November 1942.

CHAPTER II

CONTROL AT ITS ZENITH

THE TRADER AS CIVIL SERVANT

By mid-1943 control of food and of agriculture in the United Kingdom had reached a high tableland, as it were, of completeness; a tableland from which descent was to be slow, stony, and uncertain. The later years of war, seen from within the Ministry of Food, were not as uneventful as they must have appeared to the consumer, for whom a change in the points value of, say, sweet biscuits ranked as a major event to vary the monotonous certitude of household supplies. But even in the Ministry the time for new, adventurous expedients, like points rationing and the National Vegetable Marketing Company, had gone by. The controllers were not so much expansive as defensive, their eyes as much on the international politics of food as on administration that had become in high degree a matter of routine. The departure of Lord Woolton to be Minister of Reconstruction, in November 1943, symbolized a feeling that the main task on the food front was accomplished, a hope—which turned out to be sanguine—that the days of restriction were numbered.

The mature Ministry differed in extent rather than in essence from that already huge organization that had come into being, within weeks, in the autumn of 1939. It preserved the "vertical" demarcation, apparent in the Food (Defence Plans) Department, between the commodity controls, or trading section of the Ministry, and the section responsible, through the divisional and local organization, for regulating the consumer's and/or the retailer's entitlement to controlled foods. The former—the *Supply Department*—had multiplied its divisions by fission as more foods became its direct concern; the *Divisional and Local Services Department* had likewise expanded to take care of points rationing, the welfare services, the establishment of British Restaurants, and the multifarious types of "emergency" provision.

Such extensive and intensive activity went far beyond that of any peacetime Department of State; and it raised acute problems of organization and responsibility. The British constitutional convention whereby a Minister alone is answerable to Parliament and the public

for the work of his Department, and its corollary, the anonymity of the Civil Service, have as their consequence the creation within each Department of a pyramidal structure whose apex is the *Permanent Secretary* and within which each official reports to his immediate superior. The trained civil servant knows, more by experience than written rubric, the limits within which he has discretion himself to take decisions; he himself is the judge of what requires reference to higher authority. This principle holds good both in relations with the public and in the constant "horizontal" discussions within and between Departments.

Such a system demands, for its smooth working, conditions that in the wartime mushroom Ministries were not easy of fulfillment. It implies, for instance, that only a due proportion of decisions shall require to be resolved "at a high level"; otherwise senior officials will be overworked. It demands familiarity both with the type of problem to be faced and with the Governmental machine—for instance the whys and wherefores of "Treasury sanction" and the limits that the law, even in wartime, imposes on Departmental action. Although the system is capable in emergency of swift decision, it is by nature ruminative. The Ministry of Food required, therefore, to adapt it, without compromising its principles, for purposes for which it had never been intended.

Foremost among these was, of course, Government trading in food and fodder. The Commodity Divisions that bought and sold everything from bulk wheat to birdseed were staffed by businessmen chosen for their ability and high standing in their trades; but they were nonetheless part of the Ministry of Food, and their Directors, even though they might serve without personal remuneration from the Government, counted as temporary civil servants. (Most if not all of them drew salaries or fees from their firms, which of course shared in the payments made by the Government to the controlled trades as a whole.) Yet it was difficult, perhaps impossible, to define their functions, to "place" them in the chain of command, or, above all, to conceal their identities behind the mask of "a senior official," such as was worn by the Permanent Secretary himself when presiding at press conferences. In the beginning, the problem of function was evaded, rather than solved, by leaving the Trade Directors out of the hierarchy and giving each of them an "administrative assistant" within it—a sort of combined aide-de-camp and watchdog; and this device worked well enough, though not without a good deal of personal friction, during the first eighteen months of

war. In May 1941, however, Lord Woolton, who had always been inclined to exalt the businessman at the expense of the civil servant, secured the abolition of this dual control. Thereafter one man—generally, though not invariably, the Director drawn from the trade—was made responsible for each commodity division, and at the same time the former Director of Bacon and Ham was made head of the whole Supply Department, with responsibility within this sphere direct to the Minister.

It would be easy to overestimate what this change meant in the working of the Ministry. It certainly did not mean the subordination of civil servants to commodity "czars," or the wholesale adoption of methods derived from business and alien to a Government Department. On the contrary, it represented the goal toward which the civil servants who planned the Ministry of Food had always been working—namely, the peaceful integration of its two sides. Businessmen who had at first been vexed by the limitations that were imposed on them when working for the Government—limitations of foreign policy, of economic warfare, above all, perhaps, of Treasury control—had come to recognize these as necessary evils arising from the mere fact of being at war. Many of them, laboring under the responsibility for maintaining supplies and stocks, had become as zealous as any "bureaucrat" for firm legislative restraints on consumption. Trade Directors were, for instance, hot against points rationing as too loose a form of control, and several insisted on protecting themselves by fixing in advance the amount of each "points rationed" food they would release in each ration period. Trade Directors, too, were responsible for the Ministry's ultraconservative stock policy. Equally, the Minister could not have carried his civil service advisers with him in making the change, had they not been satisfied that the public interest, and above all the spending of public money, would be adequately safeguarded under the new arrangements.

The problem of the Trade Directors' identity remained rather more troublesome than that of their place in the Ministry's work. In some quarters there was some criticism of the appointment of men to control "their own" trades, on the ground that they must, therefore, be something less than impartial in dealing with them. The more ill-informed among press and politicians were also apt to complain, particularly after the war, of bulk buying by civil servants ignorant of business; which criticism, were it true, would cancel the other out. It would, in fact, be difficult to find a more expert team, so far as

overseas buying was concerned, than the Trade Directors of the Ministry of Food. Criticism of supply policy—apart from the occasional fault of judgment from which the most skilled adviser is not free—ought rather to be directed to analysis of the political and economic background of the Ministry's operations.

The former criticism—to which not only *The Economist* weekly newspaper, but the House of Commons Select Committee on National Expenditure, lent themselves early in the war—is obviously difficult to rebut conclusively. For instance, were the writer to say that in ten years' study of the records he has never come across evidence of misuse of position by a Commodity Director—as is the fact—there would still be those to argue that one cannot expect to find such evidence on record. There are, however, some general observations that can be made in support of this verdict. First, the criticism did not gain supporters with the passage of time. Second, the instance adduced by the Select Committee, of a Director drawn from a controlled trade exercising his functions within the Ministry and at the same time negotiating on behalf of the trade about its operating margin under control, was not really to the point. The Director in question (the late Mr. J. V. Rank) was not responsible within the Ministry for controlling the industry (flour milling) about which, by the accident of being president of the trade association that year, he was negotiating; he was, in fact, Director of Cereals Imports. Third, the whole question of the remuneration of controlled firms was reserved to the permanent civil servants and the highly qualified professional accountants separately appointed to each Division, and responsible to a Financial Secretary.

But—it may be argued—even if the organization of the Ministry be conceded to be proof against corruption or undue influence; even allowing that the Commodity Directors were upright men, genuinely concerned for the public interest, it must still be true that they saw things, as *The Economist* put it, "through the spectacles of the interest from which they come." The question remains whether this bias, which, because it is so probable, can most readily be discounted by those who must deal with it, is not the least dangerous kind of bias. Nothing is easier, of course, than to adduce examples of apparent obscurantism among trade interests, faced with a seemingly unanswerable case for reform; milk distribution comes to mind as a popular example. But what is more difficult is to discover an argument for changing existing methods that did not mainly rely on a combination of tidy-mindedness and oversimplification, so that its

opponents, for all the impurity of their motives, more often than not had a good case.

To balance, in fact, the benefits that came from trade opposition to wildcat schemes against the injuries from that to overdue reforms would require apparatus of great nicety. Even supposing, however, that the result were a verdict against the trade, there would in fact be no alternative to using members of it. (Overoptimism about wartime railway capacity on the part of the railway managers advising the Ministry of Transport did more obvious harm than anything attributable to a member of the food trades; but the Ministry of Transport could not have turned over the railways to some outsider to run.) So also the buying and selling on Government account of wheat, or oilseeds or rice, could not have been effectively undertaken by businessmen, however eminent, whose specialties were nonferrous metals or even sugar. (When, in default of a "natural leader" from the fish trade, the Ministry put in charge a series of able men without expert knowledge of it, the results were but a second best.)

THE MINISTRY AS LEGISLATOR

The reluctance, for which the Ministry of Food has often been criticized, to interfere with the normal channels of trade, even when, in the view of this critic or that official committee, they were "inefficient and wasteful," was not merely a matter of policy; it was also a matter of law. The emergency powers taken by the Government in the Defence Act of 1939 and the Regulations made thereunder were extensive, but they were also limited as to purpose, in a way that may be briefly summarized thus: "anything for the sake of the war, nothing for its own sake." It was for the independent judiciary, not for the Government, to say whether such and such a Statutory Order was or was not within the Act; for instance, whether it secured the maintenance of the "supplies and services essential to the life of the community." It is true that in practice, for example in the Carltona case of 1943, the courts appear to have held that, provided the Government's action was bona fide, they were not concerned whether it was "reasonable"; but even so, Departments could not be sure in advance that judges would take this line. Moreover, Parliament, either House of which had the power to annul by resolution any Ministerial Order it did not like, showed itself increasingly critical of departmental legislation and in 1944 actually established a Select Committee to scrutinize it.

How much caution was thereby enjoined on Departments appears

from the history of the Ministry of Food's attempt to introduce measures covering the composition and labeling of food offered for sale. This matter would normally have been the business of the Health Ministers, under the Food and Drugs Act of 1938, but could, in the circumstances, more usefully be undertaken by the Ministry of Food, with its close contact with the food trades and knowledge of the supply position. The Ministry consulted fully with all the interested parties before drafting its Order, intended to be issued by virtue of existing Defence Regulations. Yet this "agreed measure" was held up for six months and more because of Ministerial doubts, perhaps due to misunderstanding, about the expediency of proceeding by Order, or even by Regulation, instead of by Act of Parliament.¹ In the end it was decided to enact Regulations that would enable the Minister of Food to make detailed Orders. So, too, the various transport economy schemes were made, not under a Defence Regulation, but pursuant to a specially enacted Food Transport Order (1).

One can hardly insist too much on this continued obligation of Government to act in accordance with the Rule of Law. It had a profound effect, not only on policy but on administration. The issue of Orders about marketing, or prices, or rationing, was not a once-and-for-all business, undertaken when a commodity was controlled or rationed for the first time. It was a continuous process, in which substitution or amendment was at least as important as the multiplication of Orders to cover more and more foods. Alterations in rations or controlled prices, however small, however frequent, required amending Orders. Loopholes in existing Orders were constantly being found by ingenious traders; types of transaction hitherto unsuspected were constantly coming to light; controls tended sometimes to function in a way not intended by legislators. By the beginning of 1944 the Ministry of Food had issued 1,618 Orders, of which 1,143 had either expired or been revoked. Nearly half of the former were concerned with the control of prices.

So great a body of legislation obviously called for expert Departmental scrutiny, quite apart from any question of parliamentary or public criticism; and as early as December 1939 the Ministry of Food, following a precedent set by its predecessor of 1917, set up an

¹ Before passage of the Statutory Instruments Act of 1946, Orders were made by or on behalf of a departmental Minister; *Defence Regulations*, wider in scope, were enacted by the Sovereign in Council after they had lain in draft "on the table" of both Houses of Parliament for 28 days. Orders did not have to be "laid" in this way.

Orders Committee of senior officials, including its Legal Adviser, to review all proposals for legislation that might be made by administrators, to see that they were in line with general Ministry policy, and likely to effect their object. From the very first the Committee set its face against hasty and ill-considered legislation and, while not overtly concerned with policy, undoubtedly had a profound influence on it; so much so, that Divisions intent on a proposal would occasionally, in the earlier years of control at any rate, try to secure a decision in favor of an Order from the Minister *before* going to the Committee with it. But the Orders Committee was much more than an *advocatus diaboli* or a merely reviewing body. It constantly strove to keep the corpus of Orders tidy and as small as possible; and that it was not more successful was due to the complex and ever-changing phenomena with which the Orders had to deal.

Just as the number of Orders, despite every effort at simplification and consolidation, remained large, so their wording remained complicated—a source of vexation to Parliament, the public, and the courts, but no less so to administrators themselves. The difficulties were largely those of “definition for enforcement,” of making quite sure that a defendant, coming before a court ignorant of the food trades, did not escape on a technicality. They were increased, incidentally, by the fact that the law in England and Scotland, to which most of the Ministry’s Orders applied equally, differs widely in procedure. In Scotland, for example, all prosecutions are undertaken by a Crown official—the Procurator-Fiscal—who has first to be satisfied that they are likely to be successful; the Ministry had greater difficulty here than in England, where officials could employ local solicitors and, if necessary, brief counsel. Again, it was a Scottish court that refused to enforce the Order prohibiting the manufacture of ice cream, on the ground that there was no satisfactory definition of ice cream.

Price control Orders presented the problem of definition in its most acute form, inasmuch as they could be evaded by making slight, and to the customer imperceptible, changes in the quality of goods sold. Tea was a notorious example, inasmuch as while the amount of “fine” teas for blending diminished during the war, the amount of highly priced, supposedly superior tea offered for sale increased, under the stimulus of public clamor for it. There was no solution short of introducing a “national tea,” a remedy that successive Ministers regarded as worse than the disease. So too the borderlines between superior and inferior qualities and cuts of meat,

the amount of outer leaf that might reasonably be left on a cabbage, the fillet of fish with flaps attached thereto—all of these had to be laid down by Ministry legislators, with the errant trader usually one jump ahead. Foreseeing these difficulties, the Food (Defence Plans) Department had proposed to limit control to essentials and to establish a uniform price for these regardless of quality. But the outcry against “pooled” foods at the outbreak of war had forced the Ministry of Food to abandon some of them—margarine and meat in particular—and as the war went on it had to extend price control, in the name of the cost-of-living index, on account of public clamor, or in the vain pursuit of perfection, to foods that prudence would have left alone.

Even had the Ministry been able, however, to confine its control to the few foods with which it started, there would still be loopholes quite impossible to close. Take bacon, for example: the uninitiated might suppose that a 4-ounce ration, at a controlled pool price according to cut, represented something defined and certain, and that its distribution would scarcely need policing. Overt offenses against price control were, indeed, the least of the Ministry’s worries; if they went unpunished it was due to the connivance or indolence of the customer. What was more important was the opportunities offered by bacon for inflation of traders’ profits within the controlled price structure. Between the time a side of bacon leaves the ship, or the factory, it undergoes a process of shrinkage—of dehydration—partly owing simply to the passage of time, partly owing to smoking, the final stage in its preparation for sale. This loss of weight was of course allowed for in calculating the profit margins allowed to the trade, and in working out the equivalent in sides of a given number of rations. But it leaps to the eye how, in negotiating for this shrinkage allowance, the trade may base itself on prewar practices, and how, with competition abolished, the temptation may offer itself of reducing that shrinkage below the prewar proportions—say by “under-smoking” the bacon very slightly. In such a case the customer’s 4-ounce ration will contain that much more water than, on the average, it should; and out of the very uncertainty of the conduct of a side of bacon, the trader, without breaking the law, may wrest a certain extra profit. So in cutting up a side of bacon or carcass of meat, the “cutting loss” experienced before the war, and allowed for in the butcher’s margin, somehow shrank under the stress of emergency.

The Ministry was well armed with cost accountants to determine

traders' profits; and even though its initial efforts at price fixing, e.g., for meat, were admittedly overgenerous, opportunities for revision were frequently taken. Against sharp practice of the kind just mentioned, however, the Ministry could do little, inasmuch as its negotiations with any trade had to be based on the assumption that most of the members of that trade were above suspicion. Moreover, it was seldom that the Ministry was able to apply the full rigor of a margin based upon its Director of Costings' reports. Proceedings at its *Margins Committee*, which performed a similar function for margins to that of the Orders Committee for legislation, were apt to find the Director of Costings in the role of devil's advocate, and as such frequently defeated by the Commodity Division; nor was it rare for the Margins Committee in its turn to be overruled in the interests of generosity (never, be it noted, in the opposite sense). Nevertheless, in such a case the Ministry acted with its eyes open; and if higher authority should decide that, say, a halfpenny per pound extra profit to hake fishermen was better than a strike, it would take more than a costings report to prove higher authority wrong. For simpler commodities, such as sugar, the possibilities of accuracy in price control were of course greater.

These observations are not intended as a criticism of the Ministry's price control policy, nor of the efficiency of its administration. On the contrary it is clear that by any standards at all price control was remarkably effective, so much so as to make the policy of stabilization a feasible one. Nevertheless it must be reiterated, as Beveridge (2, pp. 339-40) pointed out long ago, that the most effective price control cannot prevent traders from making higher profits than they would under competition without shortage; and this not merely, as he said, from the impossibility of fixing a margin appropriate to relatively low-cost operators, but also from that of defining many of the commodities it is desired to control.

COMMODITY CONTROL AND ALLOCATION

Statutory Rules and Orders were, though the most important, not the only means of imposing price control. In so far as the Ministry itself owned food at one or more stages of distribution—in the case of meat, right down to the point of delivery to the retailer—it could fix its selling prices purely by administrative act. Licensing was also employed as a means of price control for a large number of miscellaneous manufactured foods, by making it a condition of the manufacturer's license that he should print the controlled price on

the wrapper or container. At one time the Ministry set great store by licensing as a means of disciplining traders in other ways; it had, so to speak, given almost every kind of dealer a license in order to be able to take it away if he misbehaved. The need for uniformity in administration led the Ministry eventually to remove the power to revoke licenses from local Food Committees; thereafter it was used only where a trader had already been convicted by a Court of grave or repeated infractions of the law. Revocation thus became the means of removing unreliable links in the chain of distribution; the threat of it ceased even in theory to be a means of preventing wrongdoing. So, too, the possible withholding of Ministry-owned supplies from an offender, thought of before the war as a useful sanction, was never employed as a substitute for prosecution.

The purpose of Ministry ownership of food, as of Ministry licensing of food traders, can, therefore, be summed up in a single word—*allocation*. The Government, as purchaser of imported foods, allocated the amount of shipping and foreign currency that should be used, the kinds and quantities of food that should be bought overseas. As purchaser of home-produced foods it put into effect the price guaranty that was a foundation of the food production drive and brought as much as possible into the common pool for controlled distribution. (That in the case of eggs, for instance, its success was only moderate does not affect the principle that Government purchase is the basis of allocation.) As owner of this pool of supplies, the Ministry of Food was enabled to regulate their movement, processing, and subsequent distribution as occasion required. It could also simplify the process of controlling prices by itself setting a single price at which it would resell, say, raw sugar, irrespective of the varying prices it might have paid for particular parcels.

Before the war, rather more was claimed for Government purchase than this. It was argued that by entering into long-term contracts with overseas suppliers, the Government would be enabled to stabilize prices and prevent speculation. Now it is undeniable that had there not been instant establishment of food control at the outbreak of war, the competition of buyers, both British and foreign, would have caused at any rate a temporary uprush of prices. One has only to look at the course of the Winnipeg wheat market in September 1939 to see that. It was, in fact, a brilliant coup on the part of the Food (Defence Plans) Department to have bought, on the eve of war, a large block of futures from the Canadian Wheat Board.

It is, however, by no means clear that the relatively stable level of the prices of its imports that the Ministry of Food was enabled to maintain during the first two years of war owed much to a policy of long-term contracts. So far as wheat was concerned, the price was kept low by *not*, at first, entering into contract with the Canadian Wheat Board. So, too, oils and fats were mainly bought on the open market. For sugar, tea, dried fruits, butter, meat, and cheese, bulk contracts were the general rule; it would, however, require close analysis to determine whether this brought any advantage beyond peace of mind. First principles would, indeed, suggest that long-term contracts are unlikely to ensure against any but temporary rises or falls in the market, if only because they will only be reached if the buyer and seller take diametrically opposed views of the probable trend of prices, or if one or the other is in a dominant position. It is, however, arguable that political considerations alone must have impelled the United Kingdom, once it had established a Government monopoly in overseas purchase, to adopt long-term contracts as evidence of good faith. The Government could not, politically speaking, use its position to squeeze producers, particularly in the Colonies and Dominions; it could not exploit the buyers' market, in almost every food, that its own blockade of Europe was doing much to bring about. Certainly whatever the economic justification for long-term contracts may be, there can be no doubt at all that they are in general made at a "political" price. But politics, not necessarily of the partisan variety, are inseparable from any but routine economic activities of Government; rather than criticize the Ministry of Food for this, one should wonder at the extent to which, helped by the existence of a Coalition Government, it managed to judge issues on their merits.

Except for meat, where the need to integrate the distribution of imported supplies with those drawn from controlled slaughterhouses led to a reorganization of the wholesale trade under Ministry control, the fact of Government purchase did not change the nature of the channels through which food passed to the consumer. It did, however, modify or diminish the functions of importing firms who had formerly traded as principals on the various produce markets now in suspense. Much of the prewar negotiations of the Food (Defence Plans) Department had been concerned with settling the fate of these firms under control. In general, there had been a conscious attempt, sometimes going beyond what was strictly necessary from the point of view of organization, to keep the firms in being by

giving them useful work to do. Sometimes, as with oils and fats, meat, and bacon, the prewar importers or brokers were formed into a wartime association or corporation and entrusted with the first-hand disposal of cargoes after landing. For cereals, Port Area Grain Committees were set up in each major port, drawn from members of the corn trade; their running costs were met by the trade out of a commission, calculated per ton of imports, paid by the Ministry to the National Federation of Corn Trade Associations. For sugar, butter and cheese, and shell eggs, on the other hand, the Ministry simply employed individual firms as its agents at firsthand, and sugar brokers continued to draw their remuneration from the foreign producers whose sugar they handled before the war. In most of these cases (sugar and tea being the main exceptions) the firms employed by the Ministry continued, at any rate during the early years of war, to conduct business in other produce on their own account.

The employment of an association or corporation of firms had the merit of simplifying the problem of remuneration. It would have been highly invidious if the Ministry of Food, by diverting cargoes to this port rather than that, or by decreeing that food should move to one inland store rather than another, should have caused one firm to get a windfall profit at the expense of another. By paying the association a lump sum, to be divided among its members as they should agree was best, the Ministry was freed both from the danger of discrimination and from the duty of determining how the pool should be divided, e.g., whether in proportion to prewar turnover or to prewar profits. By handing over blocks of work to trade associations in this way, the Ministry of Food also avoided the difficulties of applying Treasury scales of salary and expenses to large numbers of persons who were accustomed to more generous commercial terms and who otherwise must have been made temporary civil servants willy-nilly.

As control extended over more and more commodities the number of companies or associations created *ad hoc* increased. A number of them were formed in pursuit of "concentration" schemes; such were British Melters Limited (for edible fats), Fabon, Ltd. and Fabon (Scotland), Ltd. (for technical fats), and the Soft Drinks Wartime Association, Ltd. Others acted as firsthand distributors under the points rationing scheme—Candisco, Ltd. (for canned beans) and the Association of Canned Meat Importers (canned luncheon meat, etc.)—or otherwise—Associated Tripedressers, Ltd. Others again engaged in manufacture on behalf of the Ministry—

Marcom, Ltd. comprised all the makers of margarine and compound cooking-fat (shortening) and Re commissioned Mills, Ltd. operated certain inland flour mills that the Ministry caused to be recommissioned to make good the loss of capacity resulting from bombing. The short-lived National Vegetable Marketing Company has already been mentioned as an extreme and not really representative example of the species; a similar Company was at one time mooted to deal with fresh fish.

Initially it had been customary for the Minister to appoint one or more officials to sit on the Board of each of these companies, it being understood that they would not intervene in purely business matters. The prosecution of one of the companies for imposing a condition of sale contrary to one of the Ministry's own Orders, however, exposed the anomalous position of its nominee directors and it was decided that they should be withdrawn. The companies remained bound, whether by their articles of association or otherwise, to carry out Ministry instructions, but there could be no possibility henceforth of the Minister being held responsible for any misdeeds they might commit in the course of business.

It must be emphasized that the use of companies and trade associations for the Ministry's wartime purposes did not constitute, and was not intended to constitute, a reform of the distributive system or even a means of financial economy. On the contrary, bodies such as the Port Area Grain Committees found their work shrinking as war proceeded and it seems likely that many of those entitled to share in it were less than fully employed. To some extent this position was relieved by the operation of military conscription; even so, the remuneration of the grain trade, as of certain others, undoubtedly exceeded the current value of its services and contained, therefore, an element of compensation to its members for loss of business. So too the economies to be secured by the concentration and zoning of the soft-drinks industry were so much underestimated when fixing the prices of the standard product that the Wartime Association made an excessive profit. In the circumstances in which these bargains were made, however, the Ministry had little to reproach itself with. It would have been morally wrong as well as politically inexpedient for the Government so to have used its wartime powers as to prevent the prewar traders from re-establishing themselves. Nor did the reduced real costs that resulted from standardizing products and offering fewer services (as in milk distribution) form a reliable guide to what was desirable (as distinct from possible) when peace

should return. Moreover, for the greater part of the war there was a 100 percent excess profits tax to take care of any windfalls that might otherwise have accrued to private trade under control.

RATIONING AND RETAILERS' SUPPLIES

At the wholesale stage, allocation really encounters the other blade of the food control scissors—entitlement. Entitlement was arrived at in various ways. The so-called datum principle, by which a trader's supplies were related to his past performance, though increasingly abandoned, as the war proceeded, in favor of less rough-and-ready methods, persisted all through the war within other systems. It determined, for instance, the issue of fats and sugar to cake manufacturers in different regions, of canned meat and fish within the points scheme, and of fresh fish as between individual merchants and fishmongers after zoning, even though the total entitlement of fish for each zone was determined by its population. At the opposite pole to the datum principle, and incompatible with it, was of course rationing; but the most logical form of rationing, in which coupon flowback directs the supplies to meet the demand, was rare, and indeed disliked by British wartime administrators. Only tea, candy, soap from 1945 onward, and points foods regarded as a whole, conformed to it. The standard form for the United Kingdom was one in which the coupon, or rather the space for cancellation in the ration book, was no more than a ready check as between tied consumer and retailer; and the kingpin of this system was the *permit* to acquire rationed food, issued to the retailer or caterer by his local food office.

Permits were basically of two kinds, *main* and *supplementary*. The main permit was intended to enable the retailer to supply the customers registered with him, and was based on their number, except that the Food Office might reduce the quantity at his request or if it was considered his stocks were excessively high. Moreover, the retailer was not supposed to order up to the full authorized amount unless he knew that he would need it. (The pursuit of rations not taken up by consumers occupied much effort during the first years of war; the problem disappeared when the rations fell to a point at which all were taken up. Commodity Divisions did not always see eye to eye with rationing officials on this matter—lax administration of, say, a 2-ounce tea ration might prevent the Ministry accumulating overmuch in stocks, whereas a strict 2½-ounce ration might exhaust them.) Supplementary permits, on the other

hand, were issued only on proof of need by the retailer and, apart from those granted to meet special seasonal movements of population, say to holiday resorts, were intended to replace sales to travelers, service men on leave, and other nonregistered customers. Ration documents for these classes were provided with coupons that had to be cut out and surrendered to the food office before a supplementary permit would be issued.

In World War I, the Ministry of Food had turned the need for this supplementary provision into a means of simplifying the main allocation system. Retailers' main sugar "authorities" had run for six months or more at a time, and adjustment had been made only on supplementary issues. For the Food (Defence Plans) Department, which had inherited the forms and instructions of its predecessor but never subjected them to critical analysis, so simple a practice was far too loose. Heedless of paper and manpower, intent only on the utmost economy in food and the strictest discipline of the retailer, the second Ministry of Food started off with a system involving main permits rewritten every four weeks and specifying weekly quantities, and supposed to be based not simply on a retailer's registered customers but also on evidence supplied by him in the form of a return of stocks, sales, and purchases.

Partly under pressure from a trade reeling under the impact of so many forms, partly because the burden on its own local offices was palpably too great, the Ministry progressively relaxed these requirements. As early as August 1940 (October for sugar) the period of main permits was extended to eight weeks; in November 1941 a new type of permit, variously named "global," "block," or "ceiling," which allowed the retailer to buy eight weeks' supplies at one time, was introduced for sugar. This was extended to other rationed groceries in March 1942. Finally, in August 1942, the Ministry took advantage of the limitation it was imposing, in the interests of transport economy, on the number of a retailer's suppliers, to introduce a permit that was at once "continuing" and "composite"—i.e., that was only varied in the event of a substantial change (5 percent) in the number of a retailer's customers, and in which sugar, preserves, and fats were all shown on the same form. At the same time, a standing grievance among wholesalers—and Commodity Divisions supplying them—was removed; Food Offices would henceforth furnish direct to wholesalers the amounts of all their retailers in each area. (Hitherto, the retailer had had to send his permit to the wholesaler, who in his turn had to summarize permits reviewed before he

could indent on his firsthand distributor. Sluggishness on the part of retailers often led to delays in distribution.) The prolongation of permits was, of course, made less hazardous by the remarkable stability of ration levels in the years after 1941; it would have been difficult to police a system in which the relation of ration quantities to those authorized under permits was constantly fluctuating. The position would then have been analogous to that created in a retailer's stocks of points-rationed foods by alterations in the consumer's points entitlement—a matter that exercised the Ministry's ingenuity perhaps overmuch in the later years of control (3, pp. 303–4).

In the end, that is to say, the permit system for foods rationed with a tie to the retailer (other than meat, which always remained *sui generis*) reached much the same position as it had in 1918/19; specifically, the retailer received a guaranteed supply of rationed food, based on the number of his customers at the date of the last general reregistration of consumers with retailers, plus any additional amounts for which he could make out a case. During the war years, and to a lesser extent thereafter, his supplies were almost certain to be in excess of requirements, for a number of reasons. In the first place, when someone removed from one district to another, his ration book at once became a claim on a new retailer ranking for a supplementary permit; but at best there would be an interval of time before his registration with the old retailer could be canceled and a further interval before the cancellation could affect the old retailer's permit. (If the consumer had omitted to write his old retailer's name in the ration book, the delay might be indefinite.) Second, casual absences, such as holidays, away from home, increased the rationed demand on the "foreign" retailer without enabling a reduction in supplies to the retailer with whom the customer was normally registered. Third, entries into the civilian population, whether by birth, immigration, or release from the armed forces, were infallibly reflected in rationed demand; not so exits, for all the elaborate arrangements that were made to recover ration documents of the dead, of travelers abroad, and of recruits to the Services.

This tendency to inflation constitutes a principal weakness of the British system of rationing. It reached its extreme in the case of milk, for which a general reregistration that would enable the correction of retailers' permits was never successfully accomplished during five years. Before the war its development was unforeseen, partly because tradition and the authority of Sir William Beveridge

had consecrated the tie to the retailer as the only sure guaranty of supplies, partly because the system as originally devised—with new ration books (and hence reregistration) every six months, coupon cutting and frequent revision of permits in the light of actual performance—would have been reasonably inflation-proof. The hostility of rationing officials toward the supposedly looser principle of points rationing, and to the rationing of tea without a tie to the retailer, stemmed largely from a comparison of these with the registration system, not as it actually became, but as it had been to begin with.

In the long run, tea rationing was to set an example in the accurate adjustment of supplies to coupon demand; so tight did it become in the postwar years that it provided a measure of the leakage that occurred at the retail stage and resulted in a gradual depletion of stocks until the Ministry had to replenish them. (The rate of depletion—about one percent per annum—compares favorably with the two-and-a-half percent per annum inflation in registrations estimated in 1943.) In 1941 and 1942, however, it was undoubtedly looser than registration would have allowed, because the Ministry mistakenly abandoned coupon cutting for tea along with other foods in January 1941 and did not reimpose it till April 1942; even then eight months were allowed to elapse before the cut coupons were made the basis of supplies to the retailer. All this time officials had been trying to persuade the Minister to impose the retailer-consumer tie upon tea; as he truly said, they wanted a new system when they were not working the old one. At the same time, the far more rigorous points system was suspect of inflationary tendencies, and persistent efforts were made to assimilate it to the registration system, e.g., by basing dried fruit issues on sugar registrations.

It is in fact doubtful whether the tie to the retailer possesses either of the principal virtues with which it was (and is) commonly credited. The guaranty of supplies to the consumer can, as tea rationing has abundantly shown, be accomplished without it and with an overissue to retailers certainly not greater than it entails. The saving of manpower that results from not having to handle coupons has to be set against the hideous complications of permits and of the removals procedure. Even without compulsory registration there would be nothing to prevent customers from establishing a regular relationship with a single supplier. The chief advantage registration gives, both to the customer and retailer, is the consciousness of being parties to a contract *underwritten*, so to speak, by the

Ministry of Food; and, in a regime of controlled prices, there seems to be no doubt at all that customers prefer it. Nothing in food control has evoked less public objection; though it must be remembered that only a few basic foods have been subject to the tie.

There is, moreover, one advantage in registration that must not be underrated, namely, that it reduces the risk of misuse of ration books lost by, or stolen from, the holder. The fact that such ration books were frequently returned *minus* those coupons—for tea, points, and candy—that could be used at any shop underlines this very forcibly. (It may be argued that the coupons could only be used once, and that the Ministry of Food was under no obligation to replace them for the original holder—at any rate if he or she were to blame for the loss. However, one only has to think of children deprived of their rations on account of their mother's carelessness to see that the Ministry could not have taken so firm a line. It would have been just as impracticable to penalize overconsumption of gas or electricity by cutting off supplies.) Moreover, the requirement to visit a food office when moving house beyond the reach of one's present retailer was of great advantage to the National Registration authorities, since it provided a motive, that would otherwise have been wholly absent, for complying with their regulations. Indeed, from 1943 onward, the food offices undertook national registration work on behalf of the Registrar-General. This is, however, an argument extraneous to food control, even though it may be claimed that the existence of a National Register was a useful safeguard against fraud and duplication in the obtaining of ration books.²

These advantages of the tie are not to be despised. Nevertheless, it would be difficult to find a contrivance more unnatural and awkward, reflecting more clearly the conflict between the administrator's desire for tidy certainty and the changing facts of life. (One does come to mind—the short-lived *household* sugar card of 1917.) That it worked as well as it did was partly the result of the Ministry of Food's infinite capacity for taking pains, and willingness to mitigate the logic of the system by a strong admixture of its opposite when-

² National registration, i.e., the enrollment of citizens or, for that matter, ration-book holders, must not be confused with the registration of consumers with retailers, nor must their products, registers respectively of the *resident population* (by streets) and of the *buying population* (by retailers). Confusion of the two in World War I had led to a misconceived and misleading controversy in which a Central Register of consumers had been opposed by supporters of the retailer-consumer tie, with which such a register had nothing to do.

ever its presuppositions, such as a population not addicted to moving about, were too rapidly or violently upset. By contrast, a coupon-replacement system without the tie is largely self-adjusting and requires the minimum of forms and returns. Its advantages might have been overwhelming had the United Kingdom been exposed, as it was expected to be exposed, to continuous and weighty air attack.

MEAT AND THE CONTROL OF CATERERS

The peculiarities of meat control, some of which have already been noted, extended to its allocation at the wholesale stage. As the consumer's ration, in order to avoid complications between different cuts of meat, had been fixed in terms of value, the retailer's permit was also computed in those terms, namely, as the equivalent at wholesale price of the value of meat he was entitled to sell. The position was complicated, however, by two decisions taken at the time meat rationing was introduced but not provided for in the prewar plans. These had predicated that, as for a short time in the earlier war, persons consuming a meat meal in a restaurant or hotel would be obliged to surrender half a meat coupon (i.e., one-quarter of the weekly ration); and had assumed that the nominal amount of the ration would correspond to the amount of meat to be issued to civilians. In other words, meat sold by caterers would represent no net addition to the rationed demand; and supplies to retail butchers would (being based on coupons surrendered to and by them) be less than the rationed demand by an amount corresponding to the purchases of those caterers allowed to buy by wholesale.

Partly to placate the out-and-out opponents of rationing, partly to meet the representations of those concerned with school and industrial canteens, Mr. Chamberlain's Government had decided, in February 1940, not to demand meat coupons in restaurants "for the time being." It had also decided, on the ground that many people would not buy their full rations at the level of distribution proposed, to raise the nominal ration so that this slack might be taken up legally. That is to say, the Ministry of Food would issue 1s. 6d. worth of meat a week to cover a ration set at 1s. 10d. Neither of these decisions was intrinsically without merit, but they removed very neatly the basis on which meat was to have been allocated to butchers. So far as caterers were concerned, the Ministry fell back on an arbitrary issue of 60 percent of the establishment's consumption during a datum period, as stated by it—a basis that obviously favored luxury establishments and the dishonest. What was administratively speaking more important, the quantities so determined

had to be added—for the 95 percent of caterers who bought at retail—into the retail butcher's permit. If the "catering" element in butchers' permits was arbitrary, the element supposed to cover sales to domestic consumers was equally so; *ex hypothesi* all butchers taken together must require no more than 1s. 6d. per customer, but individual butchers might need more or less. To give a butcher more than he needed was to encourage off-ration sales; to give him less was to invite him to overcharge his customers in the name of giving them the full ration.

In the first few months of rationing, local Food Executive Officers, whose responsibility the issue of permits was, appear to have erred on the side of generosity, and Ministry Headquarters became concerned lest the law be brought into contempt. The weaknesses of the system, however, only became fully apparent when meat supplies fell, at the end of 1940. In the first place, the bringing of the nominal ration into line with actual supplies, i.e., down to 1s.—1s. 2d. per head per week, made a severe cut look more like collapse. Second, an attempt to sustain the domestic ration at the expense of catering establishments could not be operated by a swift adjustment of permits in which domestic and catering requirements were intermixed. Third, and for the same reason, an arbitrary cut in total permit quantities proportionate to the nominal cut in rations would be inequitable as between one butcher and another. The Ministry's meat and livestock control, its cold stores nearly empty, could not wait while Food Offices recalculated a whole set of new permits (or for that matter while Ministers made up their minds to swallow a low meat ration). So, in effect, the nominal rationing system, from December 1940 to April 1941, was superseded by an arbitrary one in which the commodity-control's area officers issued what they could spare, and distributed it according to a rough order of priority, with caterers (other than industrial canteens or "communal kitchens") at the end of the line. Helped by a slight improvement in supplies of meat in the spring, the Ministry managed to keep its head above water until a new and realistic system could be devised.

The domestic meat ration had now fallen to a point (1s. 2d. per adult per week, at a price pegged for the remainder of the war) at which "nontakeup" had virtually disappeared, and with it the large discrepancy between the nominal value of butchers' permits and the lower amount of meat issued to them. The inclusion of pork in the ration ended another source of difficulty—allocations to the specialist pork butcher, who now became solely a dealer in "manufactured meat" products like sausages and pies. Most important,

however, the makeshift "datum line" basis for supplies to caterers was replaced by an allowance of meat per main meal served, "main meal" being defined as one including meat, poultry, game, or fish. The figure taken—1*d.* worth—was fixed originally on supply grounds, but its relationship to the current ration—one-fourteenth—was found to provide a rational foundation for the whole supply of food to caterers. The housewife, it was argued, was expected to provide fourteen main meals per head per week out of, *inter alia*, 1*s.* 2*d.* worth of meat. The caterer's allowance of other rationed foods should, therefore, be similarly adjusted to the ratio each meal—whether "main" or "subsidiary"—bore to the number supposed to be furnished out of the domestic ration.

This principle of parity had the advantage of being easy to defend vis-à-vis both the caterers and their critics. But it had in theory one obvious weakness: it related supplies of rationed food to those of other foods in the obtaining of which some, if not all, caterers had an advantage over the domestic consumer. The more fish, or rabbits, or poultry, or horsemeat a caterer was able to obtain, the more main meals he could serve and the more rationed meat, fats, and sugar he would get. The vicious spiral suggested by this reasoning was made less threatening in practice, first because the Ministry's enforcement officers were swift to pounce where an establishment's allowance of, say, fats appeared to be stretched over an undue number of meals; second, because the majority of caterers could not afford to pay unreasonable or black market prices for their supplies. Nevertheless there were practical arguments to reinforce the political ones that led the Ministry to impose a maximum price on restaurant meals (in March 1942) as well as to limit the number of courses that might be served. Moreover, for one important food—fish—the principle of parity with domestic consumers was abandoned; from December 1942 caterers' supplies were put on the "meals served" basis. (A later proposal to include lobsters and crabs in this limitation was defeated at the eleventh hour, but its origin is revealing. In order to encourage inshore fishermen to catch white fish rather than crustaceans, price control had been applied to the latter; whereat they began to be bought up by caterers, for most of whom they had hitherto been too expensive.)

One may put the effect of these measures most aptly, perhaps, by saying that they made "luxury feeding" unlawful but not impossible. Ought the Ministry of Food to have gone further—as at one point of time it was within an ace of doing—and have rationed restaurant meals? The argument the Ministry itself mainly relied on—that the

saving of food thereby would be insignificant—was to this extent correct, that the Ministry had, in school and industrial canteens, built up an alternative to differential domestic rationing for adolescents and "heavy workers" that was easier to administer and that accounted for the greater part of the food consumed by caterers. (It may be noted, however, that a combination of meal coupons with differential rations for growing children would have eased the problem of feeding them during school vacations.) The further argument that supplies to retail butchers, say, could not be cut³ on account of rations not taken up by "eaters-out" was no more than an admission of weakness in the particular system of meat rationing the Ministry had chosen to adopt; it was in no way conclusive. Moreover—the supporters of meal coupons might argue—there was no getting away from the fact that habitual eaters-out were a privileged class, and if their numbers were small the privilege was that much more odious. Nor—considering the trifles that had already been subjected to control—could the argument *de minimis* be used to defend inaction.

Nowhere can the force of these moral arguments have been felt more acutely than in the Ministry itself, whose officials were by 1942/43 thoroughly indoctrinated with the ideal of "fair shares." Ministers less wary (by this time) than Lord Woolton, less suspicious of bureaucratic encroachment than Mr. Churchill, might well have found themselves saddled with the mechanically ingenious but economically unsound scheme that had been contrived for rationing meals by means of plastic tokens to be "bought" with points coupons. The fact that this scheme—which must infallibly have broken down in practice by reason of the gross inequality in purchasing power between the meal token and the single "point" for which it was to be given in exchange—was the best that experienced rationing administrators could devise, constitutes the strongest argument against meals rationing at that time and stage in the war. The casual decision in 1940 not to call for the surrender of meat coupons for meat meals, as had been planned, imposed itself on all subsequent policy not only because the growth and encouragement of industrial and school feeding built up a vested interest in it, but also because the rationing machine developed into something incapable of comprehending meals. The original resolve to have a single ration book, rather than separate cards for, say, meat, that might be carried more readily on the person was in itself by no means a negligible force

³ Late in the war means were devised to deal with this problem, so far as concerned butchers whose customers were on holiday.

against meals rationing. The degradation, thanks to the retailer-consumer tie, of the coupon into a mere space to be ticked by the retailer, the basing of permits on registrations instead of performance, and the lengthening of permit periods—all these developments meant that the casual subtraction of demand from the retailer, such as would have resulted from the surrender in restaurants of meat coupons that would otherwise have been spent with him, could not be made to react on his supplies. To devise a meals-rationing system that was satisfactory even in principle, let alone in practice, would have meant tearing up the tradition of twenty-five years and creating a genuine ration currency. The Ministry of Food had done just that for tea and points; but its members still regarded the former as a sinful deviation from the true rationing faith and the latter as only tolerable because it did not deal in necessities. The proposed points-meal exchange was an unconscious acknowledgment, rather than a conscious evasion, of the issue.

SELF-SUPPLIERS

Coupon-free meals were mainly a townsman's privilege; the countervailing one for the countryman was self-supply, more particularly of pig meat. It had always been realized that some form of provision would have to be made, within the livestock control scheme, for the farmer supplying his own household and for the cottager's pig. In the earlier war, self-suppliers had been adjured to cancel their own meat coupons, and an official table had been issued for their guidance, giving the equivalent coupon values of different species of bird and beast. That piece of innocence was not to be revived; indeed, at first the emphasis was on the encouragement of self-supply, with only the minimum of safeguards against abuse. Although the initial Order controlling slaughtering of livestock (4) required self-suppliers to seek a license from the local Food Committee for each individual calf, sheep, or pig slaughtered, it was not until a year later that any regular procedure was laid down for the issue of such licenses. Meantime a "pig club" movement had been launched under the auspices of a Small Pig Keepers Council, which received a grant from Government funds; and members of approved pig clubs enjoyed—until November 1940, when it was extended to all self-suppliers—the privilege of being allowed to sell a side (half a pig) to a butcher. (The point of this was that a whole pig carcass yielded more meat and bacon than a small household could conveniently use.)

The coming of feedstuffs rationing in February 1941 coincided

with the first complete Self-Suppliers Regulations. Each pig qualified for an allowance of meal, but no household might slaughter more than two pigs a year; a permit to slaughter would only be given if the applicant, or a member of his household, had fed and tended the pig for at least two months previously; the meat if not sold to a butcher as above, must be used in the household and not given away; all members of co-operative pig clubs (i.e., those that kept a pig or pigs in common) must share in the work of tending the pigs. These measures served as no discouragement at all to pig keeping, in the face of a meat ration that now included pork; on the contrary, the number of permits to slaughter doubled between December 1940 and December 1941, at a time when the pigs available to the Ministry of Food were falling almost as sharply, on account of the feedstuffs shortage. The Ministry viewed the success of the pig club campaign with alarm; it was all very well for the Minister of Agriculture to announce that he wanted more agricultural workers to keep pigs and so add to their rations, but the fact remained that one-fifth of the pigs slaughtered were going to one-twentieth of the population, and taking meal that might otherwise have gone to commercial pig keepers. The case for the cottager's pig was that he made good use of household scraps and, for example, chat potatoes unsuitable for human consumption; but the Ministry suspected that he might be fed on sound, if stale, bread and ware potatoes—both of them subsidized—and coined a phrase, "induced waste," embodying its fears. Certainly it was true that the store-pig market was supported, in a time of declining numbers of "commercial" pigs, by the demand from self-suppliers who may very well have been less careful of feeding costs than the professional fattener tied down by Ministry of Food controlled prices. Had it not been, the numbers of pigs might well have fallen still further; and hence it was fallacious to argue that self-suppliers' pig meat was subtracted from the common pool.

Whatever the merit of these arguments and counterarguments, their administrative result was a series of tightening-up measures that had no deterrent effect on their object; a halving of the meal ration (and of the number of pigs that each applicant might slaughter in a year), the enforced surrender of either half a pig for each pig killed or a year's bacon coupons (an empty gesture, since they represented but a small proportion of the yield of a single carcass and, moreover, could not be taken account of in supplies to the retailer concerned). Indeed, with the end of the war in Europe, slaughtering on behalf of self-suppliers reached higher and even higher levels, as the civilian bacon ration shrank, and was not notably checked by

fresh measures of restriction, announced by Mr. Strachey in February 1918.

Licenses for slaughtering sheep and calves for domestic use, on the other hand, averaged less than 5,000 each annually, a figure so small as to arouse the suspicion that many must have been slaughtered without license. Only poultry vied with pigs in arousing the suspicion and dislike of the disciples of "fair shares" and the opponents of "induced waste." When, in July 1942, the supply of "balancer meal" to domestic poultry keepers was linked with the surrender of egg registrations—one hen's ration for each egg counterfoil—the number of birds receiving rations fell overnight from 16.5 to 5.5 million (as against 2.7 million when feedstuffs rationing started). Though the former figure probably concealed some overstatement of flock numbers, it seems likely that the saving in controlled cereals was made good by feeding bread and potatoes, rather than by reducing poultry numbers to the number that could be properly fed on genuine scraps, plus balancer-meal in the quantities allowed. As with pigs, the surrender of rations still left the self-supplier very well off compared with the ordinary consumer; but at any rate the drain on controlled feedstuffs was kept within limits. Moreover, the inefficiency of the egg control, compared with that of livestock, made the case for allocating feedstuffs to commercial rather than private owners less strong for poultry than for pigs.

Abuses of the small pig-keepers' scheme, whether by absentee owners or nonworking members of clubs, were spectacular rather than numerous; and it is difficult to believe that there was, practically speaking, any way of reducing self-suppliers' pigs by a worthwhile amount, or extracting pig meat from them for the common pool. (The Meat and Livestock Control was not adapted to cope with the results of a general rule that self-suppliers must sell half their pig meat to the Government; nor would the overfat flesh from backyard pigs have converted into the kind of bacon that was acceptable on the ration.) The multiplication of cottagers' pigs and backyard hens was a result, not a cause, of low supplies on the open market; it illustrated a principle of general validity, namely, that effective control of home-produced supplies depended on maintenance of imports. The success of the Ministry of Food in getting supplies of home-grown wheat off farms, and the great difficulty it had in buying quite small quantities of oats for milling and for urban horses, demonstrate by contrast the same principle.

This rule of diminishing returns, by which the farmer, though he

might produce more, would deliver relatively less, at a time when the country was increasingly dependent on him, generated a kind of exasperation in the Ministry of Food that might have led to a head-on collision between it and the agricultural interest. That it did not do so was due largely to the effective buffer provided by the Agricultural Departments, who, true to their historic function as advocate of the industry, generally succeeded in persuading the Government to hasten slowly. Farmers, these Departments maintained in and out of season, were kittle cattle, readily upset, needing to be humored if the best, by way of production, were to be got out of them; and since the Minister of Food was not responsible for the food production drive, he had to defer, however reluctantly, to his colleagues' opinion. Many in the Ministry of Food found this irksome, and many, not only in the Ministry, held the view that a firmer hand with the farming interest would have been possible had the Ministries of Food and Agriculture been united under a single Minister.

Most, if not all, advocates of the union overlooked the stumbling block of Scottish and Northern Irish autonomy in agricultural matters. But leaving that aside, there seems no good reason to suppose that an omnibus Ministry, which would have been so unwieldy as to impose a crushing burden on its political head, would have been better fitted than the Cabinet itself to resolve the recurrent conflicts between producer and consumer interest, between zealous planner and canny politician. Contrary to the belief of many, the machinery for co-ordinating the day-to-day activities of separate Government agencies in the United Kingdom is highly developed and, as machinery, efficient. The rare instances where it fails to operate can generally be attributed either to the human element—an error of omission by an individual—or to the general weakness in analyzing the consequences of particular acts of economic policy that has already been noted, and that no reshuffling of the organization, however desirable from other points of view, can do much to remedy.

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- 2 Sir William H. Beveridge, *British Food Control* (London, 1928).
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- 4 *S.R.&O.* 1940, No. 41.

CHAPTER 12

THE TWILIGHT OF CONTROL

THE PROLONGATION OF CONTROL

On September 9, 1939, the British Prime Minister had announced that his Government was preparing for a war lasting three years. There were times, especially in 1940, when that estimate seemed impossibly long, militarily speaking; but in terms of economic organization, it was manifestly short, giving promise of a return to the status quo, of which Mr. Chamberlain's Government were mostly ardent supporters. That prospect entered deeply into the structure of food control and for a time influenced agricultural policy; it never forsook unreflecting sections of the public and of the trade. But as the war grew in extent and duration, and the deformation it imposed on the country's economy passed beyond the power of natural elasticity to restore, so the expectation-of-life of the Government's economic devices—whether one liked them or not—began to improve. Amid the uncertainties of how and when victory would come, one fact stood out: with victory, the impoverishment of the United Kingdom would no longer be masked by North American wartime aid. A country denuded of foreign assets, both dollar and nondollar, requiring to make good the capital equipment destroyed or wasted during six years of war, to increase exports that had fallen to below one-third of the prewar level up to one and a half times that level—such a country could not afford to dispense abruptly with the restrictions, or the artificial stimuli, that control of food and agriculture had provided.

Moreover, to the general arguments favoring a continuance of wartime controls there was added a specific argument: the conviction formed by the Ministry of Food as early as 1942, and written at British instance into the resolutions of the Hot Springs Conference of May 1943, that a world shortage of food would follow an armistice. This would make necessary the programing of imports on a national and indeed an international scale, the continuance of schemes of rationing and controlled distribution, and the promotion, by guaranteed markets and prices, of a high level of agricultural output at home. By the end of 1943 the British Government had, therefore,

taken two related decisions: first, to attempt to secure its forward supplies of imported foodstuffs by entering, wherever possible, into long-term contracts with overseas suppliers for as much as four years ahead; and second, to offer to farmers at home an assured market for milk and meat for the same period, at prices not less than those then ruling. The second decision was, indeed, politic, since there was at the time some misunderstanding and ill-feeling among farmers at the Government's refusal to give them specific and full compensation by way of prices for the latest wage award to agricultural workers. It was followed, in December 1944, by an announcement that the Government would henceforth review agricultural prices in February of each year in consultation with the National Farmers' Unions for England and Wales and for Scotland, and would disclose to them the data on which it based its proposals.

The Government was also committed, by its adherence to the Hot Springs Resolutions, to maintain welfare measures like the National Milk Scheme, introduced in the interests of the "vulnerable groups"; and, more generally, to undertake the improvement of the national diet. All these things appeared to add up to a continuance of the Ministry of Food well into the "transition period" from war to peace. To officials reviewing at that time the postwar machinery of government, the continuance of the Ministry in its present form, i.e., as a major department whose political head was a Minister of Cabinet rank, appeared to depend on the length of time bulk purchase of food should continue. If bulk purchase should come to an end, the remaining functions of the Ministry—concerned, say, with welfare, or with import restriction by means of licensing—might be transferred to other Government agencies; those concerned with home produce might revert to the Marketing Boards and Commodity Commissions that the wartime Ministry had partly or wholly suspended, or to other similar bodies of new design.

Had Mr. Churchill's wartime coalition been maintained into the peace, or had his Conservative party been successful at the General Election of July 1945, there can be little doubt that the Ministry of Food would have been continued on grounds of expediency; in the writer's view, its postwar career would not in practice have been very different from what actually occurred. The Labour victory, however, brought a new and controversial element into the Ministry's continuation. Labour's food policy for the election had been worked out by Sir John Boyd Orr, shortly to become the first Director-General of FAO; and for Orr and his disciples the Ministry

was something more than a piece of machinery—it was an instrument of the new food millennium. Bulk purchase, so far from being a wartime expedient, was for them in principle good as suppressing the speculative evils that prevailed on the prewar commodity exchanges; it was a guaranty of cheaper and better food for the masses. Therefore the new Government lost little time in announcing that the Ministry of Food was to become a permanent Department of State; but one not quite of the first class, for its Minister, though of Cabinet rank, was not, as was the Minister of Agriculture, a member of the Cabinet. (This distinction between Ministers continued the wartime practice of not admitting all to the *War Cabinet*, but the favor shown to the Minister of Agriculture recalls September 1919, when, says Beveridge—I, p. 304—"Lord Lee [of Fareham] . . . was in the Cabinet and Mr. Roberts [the Food Controller] was out.")

One of the strengths of the Ministry under Lord Woolton was that it had been above party controversy, not merely because of the coalition but also because the Minister himself had at this time no party allegiance. Now its very existence became identified with a political doctrine that, though vaguely supported by many citizens, was anathema to many others. When the first Labour Minister of Food, the old trade-unionist, Sir Ben Smith, was replaced by the "intellectual," Mr. John Strachey, the edge of political conflict over food policy was sharpened.¹ Lord Woolton, now chairman of the Conservative Party organization, lent his weight to criticisms of a continued policy of bulk buying and of food restrictions generally. Whether these criticisms were ill- or well-founded it would not be to the present purpose to inquire. The fact is indubitable that under the Labour Government, the Ministry could no longer operate, as had its predecessor under Lord Rhondda, behind a "press barrage of favorable opinion." And this was the more unfortunate because the Ministry, inevitably now that the war was over, was not the Ministry it had been in 1942/43. Some of its more distinguished "temporaries" had left, for their own trades or for their universities. Sir Henry French, its "permanent" head ever since its foundation as the Food (Defence Plans) Department, had retired on grounds of age. These personal losses were serious. More serious, perhaps, was the inevitable loss of the self-confident zest of the middle war years.

By contrast, the Agricultural Departments were fortunate in hav-

ing a large proportion of "established" staff; and there was no breach of continuity even at the top, for Mr. Tom Williams, the new Minister of Agriculture, had previously served as Parliamentary Secretary in the coalition. Moreover, the Labour Government's policy, promising to make perpetual and extend the system of guaranteed markets and prices fixed in advance, removed the feeling of uncertainty that the very success of the food production campaign helped to generate in farmers' minds about the future. (A Conservative Government would probably have given the same sort of guaranty.) The continued shortage and high price of imported food in effect postponed the time when awkward decisions, politically speaking, might need to be made about the future of British agriculture.

CONTINUED AUSTERITY: BREAD RATIONING

British food policy during the war had come to repose on a precarious balance, in which the Lend-Lease supplies from the United States had played an indispensable part. Not merely had they made up to a tolerable level the amount of animal products—meat, milk, lard, and eggs—in the diet and thus offset the decline in home production of such things, which had been the price paid for increased output of vegetable crops; they had done so free of charge. The British had always hoped that during "Stage II" in the war, that is to say the presumed interval between the defeat of Germany and that of Japan, Lend-Lease assistance would be continued as part of the arrangements for an orderly transition from war to peace. Anglo-American agreement on this among many other issues had been reached in November 1944. But "Stage II," which had been expected to last eighteen months, lasted less than four; the spring and summer of 1945 brought victory, but also the crumbling of economic hopes. "After practically no time of transition," write the British official historians, "no time to restore neglected plant or build up reserves or expand export production, the United Kingdom was plunged straight into the grim difficulties of Stage III" (2, p. 533). The abrupt end of Lend-Lease was, indeed, so far as the Ministry of Food was concerned, made good by the American loan; within two years, however, that had all but gone and the United Kingdom's dollar shortage was once again exposed.

It was the task of the Ministry, under Mr. Strachey, to reduce British dependence on imports of food from dollar countries—switching to other sources wherever possible, endeavoring, by an extension of the long-term contract system begun under the coalition,

¹ Cf. Beveridge on the Armistice of 1918 and food control: ". . . the spirit of national unity was broken and the manoeuvring of sectional interests for permanent position began."

to promote the production of supplies elsewhere for the British market, and meanwhile using the machinery of wartime control to restrain consumption, rather than allow prices to rise to the same end. (The Agriculture Act of 1947, guaranteeing prices and markets to home producers, may be looked at from this angle also.) The process had no hope of popularity, for it meant the disappearance of favorite items of diet, particularly canned meat and fish, and their partial replacement by inferior, or supposedly inferior, substitutes, often at a higher price. The British are conservative about food; Lord Woolton had had his failures with them over salt cod and unfamiliar types of Lend-Lease bean. The Strachey *snock*—a canned fish from South Africa—was a novelty of the same sort; but its reception was less quietly hostile, partly because of middle-class dislike of the Government, partly because the name—pronounced “snook”—invited derision. (Lord Woolton would have had it renamed more enticingly, but the Ministry had lost its old touch.) The dullness of the national diet during these years was unavoidable; it was not made more acceptable, to non-Labour supporters at any rate, by Government spokesmen’s rather tactless harping on calculations purporting to show that, on the average, people were better fed than they were before the war.

Apart from a rapid recovery in supplies of fresh fish, thanks to the release of fishing vessels from wartime minesweeping duties and a resumption of landings by European vessels, and a slow improvement in the supplies of milk, there was little to show food consumers that they were not still at war. Rationing of meat, fats, sugar, and tea continued; the points-rationing scheme remained in being; prices were held down only at an ever-increasing cost in subsidies. The biggest novelty was an unwelcome one. In July 1946, in face of the world cereal shortage, the Government felt itself obliged to impose rationing of bread, cake, flour, and oatmeal, and although there was general hope that this would be merely temporary, it actually lasted two years.

Rationing of breadstuffs was something that the British people—and the Government—had been taught to dread. But the general complaint against the scheme now introduced was that it was irksome and ineffective. The Ministry denied this, and pointed to the figures of flour consumption—103,200 tons a week in the six months preceding rationing, 90,000 tons a week in the first six months, rising to 101,000 tons a week in the first six months of 1948 (3). It claimed a saving of up to 9 percent, and added that anyway the importance

of the scheme lay in the extra control it had in reserve, should this be needed at short notice. These arguments were not as strong as they sounded. Flour consumption in the first half of 1946 was undoubtedly enhanced by hoarding, resulting from continual rumors and threats that rationing was coming; and it is by no means certain that the rationing scheme would have withstood attempts to tighten it up.

The scheme necessarily had to differ from other forms of rationing, both in making provision for different classes of consumer—heavy workers and adolescents both got more than the normal adult ration, young children less—and in dispensing with the consumer-retailer tie. The coupons were known as “bread units” (BU’s), and each represented a given weight of bread or its approximate equivalent in cake, flour, etc. In order to give the scheme extra flexibility—to allow those who found their ration insufficient to obtain more legally, i.e., without obtaining coupons from other consumers, and to encourage those who found the ration generous to buy no more than they needed—the Ministry had at first permitted the exchange of BU’s for “points” coupons and vice versa, at food offices. Thanks, presumably, to the existence of flour hoards, whether in the homes or in the shops, this device proved embarrassingly popular; flour offtake fell sharply, but the BU’s released thereby threatened to bankrupt the points scheme. The Ministry, after first raising the rate of exchange from 1 to 2 BU’s per point, was constrained to make the traffic one-way (points into BU’s) only. As with all schemes in which coupons were cut out and returned to the Food Office, checking was of a sample only; and when, in response to complaints from the trade, the Ministry withdrew the requirement that the retailer should count the BU’s he collected, his supplies necessarily ceased to bear any exact relation to the coupons currently surrendered.

According to official figures, flour sold for human consumption during the years 1945–48 was in the following amounts:

Calendar year	Thousand tons
1945	5,161
1946	4,979
1947	5,048
1948	5,329

(Since 1948 was a 53-week year, statistically speaking, the consumption figure needs to be reduced by approximately 100,000 tons to make it comparable with other years.)

These figures, though in themselves reliable, obviously do not take us very far when it comes to assessing the results of bread and flour rationing. A reduction of just over 2 percent might conceivably have been accomplished without it; the Ministry could (and did) make arbitrary reductions of this order in supplies of flour to bakers. There is certainly evidence, as the writer can testify from his own experience, that for many the ration was ample, so much so that it was difficult to get bakers' roundsmen to collect the BU's; on the other hand, coupons were invariably demanded in shops, and this cannot but have forced down casual sales of cakes and buns. (Broadly speaking, cakes are mostly bought in shops, whereas bread is delivered to the door.) It seems likely that the mere existence of the scheme made the law-abiding citizen more careful not to waste bread. What is beyond doubt is that the want of rigor in its operation means that it affords no sort of guide to the administrative possibility of making a really worthwhile reduction—say 10 percent—in flour consumption, for this would require coupon counting and checking on a scale that was never attempted. Whether any kind of bread rationing was really necessary cannot be determined or even usefully discussed unless and until the stocks of wheat in these years are made public; whether, on the other hand, the Government could have avoided imposing it in the then state of international, and particularly United States, opinion, is perhaps doubtful.

While bread rationing was still in force—in the winter of 1947/48—the worst potato crop since before the war obliged the Government to introduce a scheme of controlled distribution for potatoes also, rather on the lines that had been mooted, but not in the end effected, in the spring of 1945. The allowance to the ordinary consumer was restricted to 3 pounds a week, and a space in the ration book was supposed to be marked on the occasion of a purchase; supplies to catering establishments were also restricted. This scheme served its purpose of eking out the crop until supplies of new potatoes, fortunately early that season, came along. Other restrictions that went beyond anything attempted in wartime were on milk; in one unfavorable season (1947) certain priority allowances were temporarily reduced in order to prevent the nonpriority consumer from getting less than two pints a week. The sale of proprietary milk-based baby foods was also restricted, by Order, to those for whom it was intended. Yet another novelty was an attempt to discriminate between luxury and nonluxury catering establish-

ments; the former, defined as those charging more than 2s. 3d. for a main meal, were given smaller allowances of meat on the grounds that they were better able to obtain nonrationed food such as poultry.

Most of these measures of austerity could be defended, if not conclusively justified, on their merits at a time when supply difficulties were greater than at any time since 1941. But they were undertaken in a climate of opinion no longer all but unanimously favorable to austerity; the partial relaxation of other wartime measures, such as the rationing of motor fuel, and the general inflationary atmosphere favored evasion and hindered enforcement; this was the era of the "spiv" who could get you anything that was scarce—at a price. In response to evasion, the Ministry naturally tightened up regulations, such as those concerning self-suppliers of pigs, that lent themselves to it. But whereas Lord Woolton had been able to make such measures almost popular, Mr. Strachey had to face continual opposition in Parliament and in a section of the Press. In the cut and thrust of attack and defense, things were said on both sides that impartial witness would not support. Conservative politicians, including men who should have known better, claimed that "bulk buying by civil servants" was the root cause of food shortage, which would be cured by handing the job back to private trade. Supporters of the Government made equally extravagant claims in the opposite direction; there was much talk of that favorite project of reformers since the nineteen-twenties, reorganization of fruit and vegetable distribution; the food subsidies were praised as a great effort of welfare; it were almost impious to question the continued usefulness of wartime devices like the Government distribution of vitamins for children, or the body-weight survey.

All this controversy was bad for the Ministry of Food, because the dogmatism of both sides got in the way of cool discussion of its future, as well as hindering its operation in the present. If, on account of continued foreign exchange difficulties—the dominating feature of the postwar economic scene—the Ministry could not be ended, it was expedient that it be mended as soon as possible. If partial or full decontrol were to be decided upon, the question still arose of what, for each particular trade, could replace it. The long duration of control—a thing wholly unexpected in 1936–39—had in itself created a whole set of problems requiring to be resolved. Would it, after ten years of Government imports of wheat, be possible to restore the competitive structure of the grain trade, that had already long been losing ground in face of the great flour-milling

combines?" Would it be desirable, even if it were possible, to restore the 16,000 slaughterhouses, reduced to some 800 under the Meat and Livestock Control Scheme? Above all, the means of implementing the guaranteed prices of farm produce, made permanent by an Act of Parliament in 1917, needed to be worked out. Was the Ministry of Food, with its power (subject to Treasury agreement) to divorce, by subsidy, consumers' and producers' prices, the best engine for the purpose? Or was it, as a Committee of Inquiry of 1946 argued, too much identified with the interests of the distributor, the hated "middleman"? These and similar questions were not illuminated by party slogans about "free enterprise" and "community control"; party rivalry for votes, moreover, made it likely that organized pressure groups such as the farmers would be able to exert undue influence on policy, compared with the unorganized consumer. (This had begun to be true before the war, in the period of producer-controlled marketing boards.)

CHARACTER OF FOOD ADMINISTRATION

Contemplation of the rather faded Ministry of Food of the nineteen-fifties may, indeed, lead the observer to underrate its performance; just as in the opposite sense Lord Woolton's prestige, and Lord Rhondda's a generation before, caused their wartime Departments to gain credit for farsighted planning of a rare kind. In both wars there was—one can readily come to believe—a golden age of food control that shone out by comparison with periods when the Ministry of Food was manifestly not fully master of its task. Beveridge (*l*, p. 342) describes the reign of Lord Devonport, the first Food Controller (1916/17), as "a period of food control without principle on practical lines; a scurrying hither and thither in chase of the unapprehended consequences of ill-considered actions."

For all the labors of the Food (Defence Plans) Department, much the same could be said of the winter and spring of 1940, when the reputation of the second Ministry of Food, through faults by no means entirely its own, stood at its lowest. In so far as these faults were due to want of a considered program, not merely for food but also for other aspects of war-economic policy, a determined effort was made to correct them, to which the progress of the war itself gave strong and decisive support. By, say, the beginning of 1942, the *ends* of food and agricultural policy stood defined and coherent, in relation not only to each other but to the whole of the

war economy. The controversy between Government agencies, in the heat of which those ends had been forged, was thereafter limited, for the most part, to questions of degree; of how far and how fast a particular piece of policy, be it the concentration of industry, the increase in the potato acreage, or the transport economy schemes, should go.

So, too, the means to carry out a thoroughgoing policy had been much improved. The Government was now in possession of statistical and other information about the country's economic life that, if it did not always bear the weight of the speculative structures that were built upon it, was nevertheless far more abundant than in the early stages of the war. Forecasts of the rate of imports, in the hands of the expert statisticians of the Ministry of War Transport, attained an almost uncanny accuracy. By the nature of things, such forecasting was not possible for home production: hence, for instance, the enormous food stocks of 1943 onward, deriving mainly from the bumper harvest of that year. But, in a different way, the knowledge gained by County and District War Agricultural Committees of the potentialities of every farm and every piece of land in the Kingdom provided an indispensable basis for the production achievements of those years. In the field of transport economy, the impressive performance of the Ministry of Food was only made possible by close and detailed study of the movement of innumerable separate loads; similarly close and detailed study alone could reveal fully the limited scope for "concentration" in the food industries.

In no aspect of Governmental economic activity is this prerequisite of detailed and exact knowledge more evident than in the attempt to control and stabilize prices. For the want of a coherent price policy at the outbreak of war the general weakness of civilian Whitehall in economic strategy, and the particular failure of the Treasury to formulate its principles clearly, are responsible. Otherwise the policy of stabilization might have taken shape at the beginning, instead of remaining unavowed till 1941. But in fairness it should be granted that, in 1939/40, the means for putting into effect such a policy were most imperfect even for food, for which the control machine was comparatively complete. When, in response to public complaint, the Ministry of Food began a hurried extension of price control beyond the twenty or so staples, the results were anything but satisfactory. For any but the simplest foods, even when price control was reinforced by control of distribution and even rationing, the fixing of profit margins that should not be excessively

² This was written before the decision to decontrol grain in the summer of 1953.

generous demanded months and even years of investigation. The milk-price structure of 1912, like the zoning schemes and the food standards and labeling reforms, was the result, not only of arduous negotiations, but of painstaking "operational research."

Achievements of this sort, thought out from beginning to end, were, however, exceptional. It is significant, moreover, that both in milk control and food transport economy, the successful schemes were preceded by others more ambitious and less studied, and that the proponent of one of these—Lord Perry—was foremost in denouncing as a surrender to vested interests the plan that was eventually adopted. Such critics commonly underestimate the difficulty of reforming any complex economic organism, and, be they professional economists or businessmen turned planners, are apt to produce merely tidy schemes, like the original one for fish distribution, that break down on their first contact with reality. "Canst thou draw out leviathan with an hook?" It was this complexity, this recalcitrance of real life in face of the planner with his blueprint, that limited the influence of the new machinery of forethought that the Government had acquired. Of great importance for the broad outlines of the war-economic plan—such matters as import programs, manpower budgets, and general price policy—its influence on the actual administrative process, on the devising and management of control schemes, was for food at any rate quite small. The points-rationing scheme is the only important food control measure that was the work of professional economists; and they were quite deliberately excluded from advising on its day-to-day management. The elaboration of commodity controls, or of straight rationing, proceeded by an endless and patient process of trial and error, in which first principles had little place.

The fact is that the very maturity of the British governmental system, and its whole habit of thought, predispose it to an extreme empiricism. Professor Tawney (4, pp. 6–7) has described how a great body of economic controls in World War I was built up by such methods:

. . . the impressive fabric of state control . . . was not deliberately constructed at all. . . . The different parts composing it had the common feature of being a reaction to scarcity, actual or threatening, and of being jolted forward by successive changes which made scarcity more acute. . . . Thus a collectivism was established which was entirely doctrinless. The most extensive and intricate scheme of state intervention in economic life which the country had seen was brought into existence, without the merits or demerits of state intervention being even discussed. . . . The economic breakwaters

which, if seen as a whole, would have caused cries of alarm, grew, like coral islands, through the unseen activities of the industrious, but silent, insects composing the Civil Service.

This phenomenon, Tawney notes, favored the growth of the control machine during the war, but also made for its rapid disappearance, once the war was over, under political pressure from the advocates of what President Harding called "normalcy." "War collectivism had not been accompanied by any intellectual conversion on the subject of the proper relations between the state and economic life, while it did not last long enough to change social habits."

For "social" in that sentence read "administrative," and it may fairly be applied to Whitehall between the wars. It is true that F. H. Collier, a shrewd and witty lawyer turned civil servant, could write in 1925 that economists were gradually replacing lawyers "as the blunted instruments of State policy" (5, p. 310); but here, surely, the qualifying words are what matter. British professional administrators, for all that they have long been recruited from an intellectual elite, habitually combine a high degree of shrewdness and practical judgment with a distaste for systematic thinking, or at any rate for its application to their day-to-day problems. Between the wars, under Governments that, apart from two short periods of minority Labour rule, were professedly opportunist in dealing with economic questions, there was no pressure upon civil servants to desert the time-honored principle, *solvitur ambulando*; negotiation, "common sense," compromise, were not merely means to an end, but often an end in themselves. (The Munich agreement of 1938 might be said to exemplify this method applied to foreign policy.) Despite the plea of Beveridge in 1936 that feeding policy, and indeed the whole civilian side of the next war, should be thought out in advance and as a whole, these habits of thought persisted in the period of prewar planning, and remained powerful throughout the war. So much is this so that one should, perhaps, view with skepticism any official paper, such as the Treasury memorandum of 1929 on *The Course of Prices in a Great War* (2, pp. 47–48), that appears to be laying down general principles. The appearance of such a paper may mean no more than that an occasion has arisen that calls for a statement of the kind; not that the whole of Government policy on the matters in question is, or will be, consciously imbued with such principles.

It is, of course, inevitable that once such a statement has been enunciated, however transient the occasion for its appearance, it

should be referred to subsequently as the voice of authority. The history of the hypothesis of the 25 percent cut (i.e., fall) in food imports in a major war—adopted by the Committee of Imperial Defence in 1936, and transmuted by 1938/39 into (a) an argument that shipping would not be scarce at the outset of a war, and (b) a reason for increasing loadings of food overseas by one-third should war break out (6, pp. 63-67)—illustrates very well what may happen if economic administrators are accustomed to refer only fitfully to first principles. Their excuse was the less in this instance because no one could suppose that political expediency dictated the formulation of faulty hypotheses about the economic aspects of a future war. So too with the design of the main rationing scheme, which was found, when it came into operation in 1940, to have defects that can be traced to neglect of principles, some of which had been specifically reiterated by Beveridge in 1936, and which could certainly have been inferred with a fair degree of certainty from the remaining documents of World War I.

Not that these documents were not used; on the contrary, their use serves to illustrate, in all too many instances, the dangers of an uncritical devotion to precedent. Admittedly, the collection of material at the end of the first period of control, for the benefit of posterity, had not been very intelligently done. The ration schemes of 1918-20, like their successors, underwent many changes during their existence that are by no means easily plotted from the documents that the old Ministry of Food had gathered together, and that included forms and instructions drawn apparently at random from different stages in the development of schemes. But only an official blind to the functions of such things could have taken a form of application by a retailer for supplies, intended as a once-for-all document to launch a scheme, and embodied it as a recurrent feature in a new one. It might, indeed, be argued that the rationing scheme of 1940 would have been a better one if opportunities for such mechanical reproduction had not existed, and officials been forced, like their predecessors in 1917, to work out principles and details from scratch.

Of course, the defects from this cause were painstakingly corrected as they became apparent. Officials were tireless and ingenious in amendment, and seldom neglected opportunities to improve, and where possible to simplify, their methods. They learned, and learned willingly, from their own experience. What they were less willing to do—and this goes for trade directors as much as adminis-

trators proper—was to learn from the experience of others, particularly if this meant the application of critical analysis to it. For all Lord Woolton's panache and business shrewdness, for all the brilliant staff his Ministry recruited, the qualities most evident in its work are not brilliance in formulating policies, or virtuosity in their execution, but doggedness and patience in retrieving situations and seeking new solutions. The point is an important one for those who seek to explain the triumphs and failures of British administration, since it illuminates both. The rationing schemes, as they eventually matured, show the method of trial and error at its most successful; the postwar Groundnuts Scheme exhibits the method's weakness on an unprecedented scale but is, in the writer's view, wholly typical of it.

Ingenuity and skill in extricating oneself from difficulties are qualities not to be despised in an administrator; but the sight of them constantly displayed nevertheless throws doubt on his mastery. The recourse to a planned economy, whether for war purposes or in deference to socialist doctrine, called for new habits of thought among the officials who directed it. The old qualities of fairmindedness and patience in negotiation, for which the higher civil service in Britain is justly celebrated, were still indispensable; but fresh sorts of skill, technical or commercial, had to be brought into service. Above all, it was necessary to develop in the economic field what corresponds in the military field to the arts of strategy, tactics, logistics, and deployment. Beveridge, contrasting the "period of food control without principle on practical lines" under Lord Devonport with that of Lord Rhondda which followed it, makes the point with characteristic force (1, p. 341):

Mr. Runciman and Lord Rhondda were both economists, that is to say, they considered the remoter as well as the immediate consequences of their own actions; they were both of the tiresome sect which keeps on asking what happens to exports if one shuts out imports.

There were all too many occasions in the second Ministry of Food when the voice was the voice of Lord Rhondda, but the hands were the hands of Lord Devonport.

THE ACHIEVEMENT ASSESSED

If the achievement of the United Kingdom Government in wartime food and agricultural policy is, that is to say, rather more humdrum and improvisatory in manner than contemporary propaganda would have the outsider believe, and if, as regards home production

in particular, it enjoyed a well-deserved good fortune, nevertheless it is more than imposing in extent. The figures of food imports really sum it up.

Calendar year	Million tons
1931-33 average	22
1940	18.8
1941	14.6
1942	10.6
1943	11.5
1944	11.0

By a combination, that is to say, of increased home production with conservation measures, regulation of distribution, and changes in dietary pattern, it proved possible to sustain the nation in health and efficiency on imports that, for the last three years of war, averaged only half the prewar figures. Moreover, stocks of food in September 1945 were perhaps twice what they had been in 1939. Though in execution the measures adopted to achieve this result were complicated and exacting, in principle they were simple. The most important import economy consisted in eliminating animal feedstuffs almost entirely. The import of maize, oilcake, and "feeding" barley and oats, some 5 million tons annually before the war, was reduced to negligible proportions after 1941. A further million tons a year was saved indirectly, by the raising of the extraction rate. Nearly one and a half million tons a year was saved on fresh fruit and nuts; sugar imports, from 1942 to 1944, averaged one million tons less than before the war. Sugar, indeed, was the single staple food (if one count butter and margarine as interchangeable) for which the ration represented a really severe cut in supplies. Rationing for other foods was largely necessary to restrict demand from rising as a result of war prosperity, and as an adjunct to price control.

It was the peculiar good fortune of the United Kingdom that the perfecting, by the process of trial and error that has already been described, of the food control machine, and the full release of the productive resources of agriculture, dormant during the interwar period, coincided with the period of greatest national need, from 1941 onward. Had that trial come earlier in the war, both must have been found wanting. Again, the decision of the United States to grant Lend-Lease aid was timely, not only because dollars for food had run out, but because with the assurance of American supplies, the food production campaign could be planned for maximum

shipping economy without forcing the British public on to a near-peasant diet that might not only, for sheer unfamiliarity, have seriously affected morale and industrial efficiency, but put a strain on the food administration that it was unable to bear. Lend-Lease, moreover, reinforced the policy of food welfare, not merely by supplying such things as concentrated orange juice, but also, for instance, by making it easier to "put across" the policy of priorities in liquid milk. So too Lend-Lease cheese, dried egg, canned meat, and canned fish relieved anxieties about supplies of first-class protein; the two last enabled points rationing to get off to a good start and incidentally helped to restore the reputation of the Ministry of Food, smirched just then by its dealings with milk, eggs, and onions.

Without Lend-Lease supplies, in short, the diet of the British people must have become patently inadequate for health and morale. Was it adequate with them? Some of the difficulties and weaknesses in the various attempts that have been made to assess it, whether by calculation or inference, were pointed out in the chapter on welfare. That, in terms of nutrients, the diet available to the average civilian was, if anything, better than before the war may be accepted without ado. That certain health indices generally held to be connected with the state of nutrition, such as infant and maternal mortality rates, reached new favorable levels is equally undeniable. Moreover, disquieting developments in the earlier years of war, such as an increase in tuberculosis and anemia among certain sections of the population, were halted or reversed in the later years. Industrial productivity was in general well maintained, and the exception to this rule—output per man-shift in the coal mines—does not seem to be correlated, by impartial observers, with inadequate food supply. (Miners, however, continually demanded, and after the war obtained, an extra meat ration.)

This is not to say that the diet, or its distribution, could not have been bettered. The Consumption Levels Inquiry of 1944 noted that esthetically it left something to be desired, and this not merely from the absence of luxuries like cream. There was, investigators remarked, a shortage of foods suitable for entrees—meat, fish, fresh eggs. The writer would himself add to this list an insufficiency of fats, particularly for cooking, and an excess of potatoes; most British people, however, would probably have complained most about the shortage of sugar. The debasement of quality, remarked on by Beveridge as a feature of the earlier period of control, was notable: no succulence in the wartime sausage, and even such minor sub-

stances as the tomato sauce round canned beans deprived of its savor; corn flakes replaced by wheat flakes. (There was talk of including potato flour in a good many manufactured foods, but happily this came to nothing.)

On the whole these "austerities" could not be dispensed with, though there must be some reservations about some of the pettier economies enforced in the name of victory. As Mr. Churchill, who never lost his sense of proportion in these matters, once told his colleagues, the United Kingdom was "a modern community at war, and not Hottentots or Esquimaux" (2, p. 491). When, in mid-1912, there had been talk of drastic economies in consumption to save still more shipping, he had written (2, p. 425):

At the cost of much internal friction and disturbance we may by "tightening the belt" save perhaps a million tons. Whether this should be done as a moral exercise should be carefully weighed. It can, however, have no appreciable effect upon the problem of maintaining our war effort at home and abroad.

The Prime Minister disliked even more than most the shifts to which the Ministry of Food had been driven by shortage of supplies, and could not rejoice with those physiologists and others who saw in the war a golden opportunity to force the public to eat more of what they thought was good for it and less of what it liked. As early as 1941 he had expressed alarm at the austere tendencies of food policy. Without such counterbalancing influences, the diet might, through sheer ingenuity and devotion, have been rendered intolerable.

The Ministry of Food prided itself, both during the war and after, on having secured fair distribution of food. (A review of the writer's first official volume, by the ex-Minister of Food, Mr. John Strachey, was headed "The Ministry of Fair Shares"; and "fair shares" here may be taken, perhaps, to mean much the same as the old Socialist slogan, "to each according to his needs.") Roughly, the aim had been to combine general equality of opportunity for all to secure the basic foods with special priority for the "vulnerable groups." Leaving aside the latter—the welfare aspect of food policy—how far was the general aim achieved? Did marked disparities of consumption survive all but universal control and rationing?

One may perhaps best begin to answer such questions by saying, as the Ministry itself did at an early stage in its career (6, p. 125): "Rationing is essentially inequitable; it provides the same quantity of an article for each person without any consideration of their

needs or habits or of their capacity to secure alternatives." For all that it was written with an ulterior motive—to secure more shipping for food—that assertion is true, more particularly of straight rationing; points rationing is on this ground preferable. It was notorious that rationing bore most hardly on those living alone, least upon those families whose capacity for mutual adjustment was greatest; particularly was this true of meat and of the more desirable points foods such as canned salmon. Ready access to unrationed "main meals," however unattractive, in a restaurant or works canteen, affected not merely an individual, but his whole family. (The writer, for example, ate five lunches a week "out," virtually all through the war.) The rationing system favored those with tiny children (who got adult rations of everything except meat); by contrast, the feeding of adolescents during school holidays was a recurrent nightmare for mothers. Of course, it does not follow necessarily that all the measures, such as differential rationing and coupons for meals, propounded to secure greater paper equality, would have done so in practice.

A less universal source of inequality arose from the persistence, already noted in the discussion of points rationing, of methods of allocation related to a datum performance. Movements of population had a way of making such methods inappropriate; so might war prosperity in areas like South Wales where unemployment had used to be rife, giving traders there a low datum for semiluxuries like canned fruit. On the other hand, prewar habits might work to an area's advantage; Scotland, with its high consumption of bakery "smalls," retained a proportionately higher title to sugar and fats for making them. (On the other hand, it went shorter of winter milk than England and Wales.) For fresh fish, a uniform per capita distribution could not be accomplished; for "manufacturing meat" (for sausages and meat pies) it was not even attempted. Supplies to catering establishments were on an equal footing; but inevitably some areas had more establishments—and hence more food—than others.

Last, but not least, there were limits to the ability of the controllers to lay hands on home-produced foods. Eggs, poultry, rabbits, pig meat, fresh fish, milk—for none of these could the producer be made to ration himself, his family, or friends; and especially after the war, the supplies of the first four of these passing, often quite legitimately, through uncontrolled channels were so great as to reduce markedly the amounts available to the unprivi-

leged consumer. The wealthy man who kept, on rationed feedstuffs, cows sufficient to supply his household with milk, cream, and butter, and sent none of their produce to market at all, was a rarity, but for that very reason was left alone.

To some extent these various inequalities and privileges, within or without food control, canceled each other out; the worst of them was as nothing compared with the abuses that would have arisen without it. Thus each extension of control during the war was the occasion for general public satisfaction, and there were many who clamored for measures, such as the strict rationing of milk or fish, that were beyond any Government's capacity. (In the field of price control, indeed, there can be little doubt that its very success caused the Ministry to attempt too much—with onions and cabbages, for example.) The public, of course, was apt to want to eat its cake and have it too; to complain of the small allowance of eggs and bacon and yet gird at the restrictions on self-suppliers. But speaking generally, the verdict on wartime food control was that it was fair—that the Ministry of Food had done a "good job."

Beveridge, passing a similarly favorable judgment on the work of the former Ministry of Food, remarked that "the chief merits of control are inseparably connected with a prolonged and serious shortage of supplies," such as would be associated with a major war. Of statutory price control and bulk purchase in peacetime he was alike skeptical; the first "is not an instrument of precision," the second was likely to work to the producer's rather than the consumer's advantage. He wrote (*I*, p. 344):

I can only record here, as a result of Ministry of Food experience, a personal doubt of any gain either to consumer or producer from public regulation of food-supply in peace, that would repay the cost of the vast organization involved, or justify diversion to it of any of the limited store of political energy and ability needed for more urgent problems, or outweigh the risk of bribery by subsidies. . . . From food control at highest little can be learned of permanent application. . . . It opened no ways of permanent advance; its record is that of one small aspect of the human spirit in its five years' prison, but here upon a treadmill that has ground no corn. . . .

A quarter of a century ago, when that passage was written, it still seemed possible that State regulation of economic activity might be kept within narrow limits. We know better now; world depression and war have between them dashed Beveridge's hope that the "forms and circulars, reports and instructions, schemes and counter-schemes" might lie buried in the archives forever. But more than

ten years' repetition of food control has, in the writer's view, done nothing to upset his judgment of 1928; it has, rather, confirmed it. The very fact that the State has, perforce or by common consent, extended so far the frontier of its economic and social operations has made the task of husbanding a limited store of administrative talent an urgent one. Few people now suppose that the regulation of agricultural marketing, or even the guaranty of prices and markets, is likely to be abandoned; in the United Kingdom, as in many other countries, the agricultural industry has succeeded, as it did not in World War I, in pegging out a permanent claim for preferential treatment, and the unwelcome corollaries, such as State dispossession of farmers found to be incompetent, are not likely to make the industry renounce State guaranties. The English National Farmers' Union evoked some derision recently when, apropos of the decision to abolish the wartime control of egg marketing, it remarked that there would be some difficulty in working out practical ways of securing both freedom in marketing and a guaranty of prices and markets. To many, whether supporters of state control or "free enterprise," this sounded like another case of wanting the best of both worlds. To the historian, however, it is in the long tradition of mankind, not wholly abandoned even in the heyday of *laissez faire*.

It is to be hoped that the question of how much and what sort of control the State shall exercise over economic affairs may come increasingly to be settled on practical grounds. British experience in food administration gives no sort of support to those who favor control for its own sake, or suppose that modern techniques of "planning" have been perfected to the point at which the old arguments against collectivism are no longer valid. For all that the wartime Government enjoyed a degree of popular support that no peacetime Government can hope to command, for all that it could draw on reserves of administrative talent that could not normally be spared from other activities, for all that these assets were added to a senior civil service drawn from an elite and singularly free from political influence and financial corruption, the success of food control was dearly bought in effort. The attempt to replace market forces, obedience to which calls only for application of rule of thumb, by conscious direction requiring continual alert intelligence, meant a strain on the controllers so great that several leading members of the Ministry of Food broke down under it. To the laboriousness of food control in the earlier war, Beveridge testified from personal

experience; and it is here, perhaps, that his judgment retains its greatest validity. H. G. Wells, despairing of *homo sapiens* a few years before his death, put the point more vividly, when he wrote of "Mind at the end of its tether."

This may seem a harsh and ungracious note on which to end a survey of so wide and rich a field of accomplishment. But the writer is convinced that it is the proper one; not primarily because ration cards, permits, and orders can be irksome (as much can be said of the motoring laws), but because they represent the wasteful use of a resource—firstclass administrative talent—of which no country in the world has enough. We should acknowledge and take advantage of the incidental benefits that control helped to confer, whether upon the state of nutrition of the poor or the state of repair of the nation's agriculture; we should deny to control in itself, and as a whole, any merit beyond that of necessary evil. Only by such rigor in sifting out the less necessary tasks of the Welfare State, will it be possible to keep efficient the discharge of those tasks that all would now agree are essential.

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CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE AND INDEX

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CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE AND INDEX

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1936: April	Committee of Imperial Defence sets up Food Supply subcommittee. Beveridge inquiry into rationing.
November	Food (Defence Plans) Department formed within Board of Trade.
1937: November	Decision to set up "shadow" food control organization announced. Agricultural Development Act; increased subsidy on cereals, subsidy on fertilizers.
1938: April	Government buys security stocks of wheat, sugar, and whale oil.
Autumn	Munich crisis brings about enlargement of Food (Defence Plans) Department.
December	National Register to be compiled in event of war.
1939: April	Plowing-up grant of £2 an acre announced. Government decides to purchase reserve of tractors. Further purchase of whale oil.
August	Purchase of Canadian wheat futures.
September	Formation of Ministry of Food. Establishment of County and District War Agricultural Executive Committees. Fish Distribution Scheme started and abandoned. National Register taken.
October	Decontrol of margarine and cooking fats.
December	First discussions of Subsidy Policy. Farm-price guarantees announced.
1940: January	Rationing of bacon, butter, and sugar. Price control of oats.
February	Control of livestock slaughtering, marketing, and prices.
March	Meat rationed. Import of all foodstuffs subjected to government license. Lord Woolton succeeds Mr. W. S. Morrison as Minister of Food.
May	Mr. Churchill forms coalition government. Lord Woolton continues as Minister of Food; Mr. R. S. Hudson becomes Minister of Agriculture. Agricultural production program stepped up; rise in farm wages and prices arranged (effective July 1940).
June	National cheap milk scheme for mothers and children receives Cabinet approval. Perry Committee on Milk Distribution appointed. National farm survey begun.

July	Rationing of tea, margarine, cooking fats.
September	Abrupt fall in food imports. Communal feeding movement launched. Heavy air raids on London begin. Autumn glut of home-killed meat. Subsidy on animal feedstuffs. "Rationing" of potassic fertilizers.
October	Publication of Perry Committee's Report.
November	"Saturation" air raid on Coventry begins new series of attacks on provincial cities.
December	Standstill order on prices of manufactured foods.
1941: January - June	Abortive campaign for compulsory slaughter of livestock.
January	Food Salvage Organisation set up. Sharp fall in meat ration.
February	Rationing of animal feedstuffs.
March	Feeding of millable wheat to livestock forbidden. Rejection of Perry Report announced. First attempt to restrict milk supplies to nonpriority consumers.
April	Formation of Government-owned company to market carrots and onions. Budget speech announces policy of price stabilization through subsidies.
May	Cheese rationed. End of sustained air raids.
June	Jam rationed (after minimum-share scheme).
July	Eggs "quasi-rationed." Control of white-fish prices. First substantial shipments of Lend-Lease foods arrive.
September	Order controlling food substitutes.
October	Milk "quasi-rationed." Food Transport Order. Rationing of farm machinery.
November	Carrot advertising campaign. Wet-salted cod advertising campaign.
December	Points rationing scheme begins. Government issue of vitamins to mothers and young children.
1942: February	Soap rationed.
March	National Vegetable Marketing Company [April 1941] to be wound up. Flour extraction rate raised to 85 per cent.
April	Price control imposed on catering establishments. Virtual beginning of "concentration" of food industries.
May	"White Paper" on Milk Policy.

June	"Rationing" of phosphatic fertilizers.
July	Rationing of chocolate and sugar confectionery. Tea ration withdrawn from children under five. Feedstuffs for poultrykeepers issued in return for surrender of egg "registrations."
August	"Sector scheme" limits radius of wholesale distribution; retailers of many foods confined to a single supplier.
September	Manufactured Foods Order.
October	New marketing arrangements introduced for milk (England and Wales only). White-fish zoning scheme introduced.
1943: January	"Dilution" of bread with barley and oats begins.
May	Order controlling farm machinery. United Nations Food Conference, Hot Springs, Va.
July	"Safe Milk" policy announced.
September	Points-coupon banking scheme introduced.
November	Lord Woolton appointed Minister of Reconstruction; succeeded as Minister of Food by Colonel J. J. Llewellyn.
December	Bread dilution discontinued.
1944: January	Food Standards Regulations issued.
May	Four-year guaranty of farm prices promised.
June	Flying-bomb attacks on London and S.E. England begin.
1945: July	Labour Party wins General Election. Sir Ben Smith appointed Minister of Food; Mr. T. Williams, Minister of Agriculture.
September	End of Lend-Lease supplies. Retirement of Sir Henry French, Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Food.
1946: May	Mr. Strachey succeeds Sir Ben Smith.
July	Bread and flour rationing introduced.
December	Civic Restaurants Act.
1947: August	Agriculture Act establishes guaranteed prices and markets on statutory permanent footing.
November	Potatoes quasi-rationed.
1948: April	End of potato "rationing."
July	End of bread and flour rationing.

INDEX

- Abyssinian crisis, 9
 Acts of Parliament: Agricultural Marketing Act, 5; Agriculture Act (1920), 4; Agriculture Act (1937), 11, 73; Agriculture Act (1947), 220, 221; Civic Restaurants Act, 175; Crown (Emergency Appointments) Act, 19; Emergency Powers Act, 17; Essential Commodities (Reserves) Act, 14, 73; Food and Drugs Act, 195; Wheat Act, 6
 Administration, character of British food, 190 ff., 215, 224 ff.
 Admiralty, 8-9
 Agricultural Departments, 4, 36, 40, 41, 61-62, 84, 215
 Agricultural Executive Committees, War, 31, 32, 35, 44, 45, 72-76 *passim*, 82, 89, 225
 Agriculture, 4, 7 8, 11, 70 ff.
 Agriculture and Fisheries: Minister of, 4, 39, 43, 95, 218, 219; Ministry of, 7, 30, 32, 103
 Air raids on the United Kingdom, 49, 160-72 *passim*

 Baby foods, 130, 146-47, 222
 Bacon, 6, 20, 132, 133, 151, 188, 197
 Banking scheme for points coupons, 121 ff.
 Barley, 6, 33, 37, 38, 40, 71-72, 179, 180 81
 "Basal diet," 50
 Beer, 35, 72, 138, 179, 181
 Beveridge, Sir William H. (later Lord), 4, 9, 10, 12, 17, 20, 80, 81, 86, 111, 140, 158, 161, 179, 198, 224, 227, 228, 229
 Biscuits, 125, 126, 136
 Body-weight survey, 156, 157, 223
 Bread, 83, 177 ff.
 Bread rationing, 129, 182, 185, 189, 220-21
 Breakfast cereals, 119, 127, 137
 Brewing, *see* Beer
 British Medical Association, 151, 157
 British Restaurants, 166, 167, 172 ff.
 Budget speech of 1941, 112, 152

 Bulk purchase, 199, 217
 Butter, 6, 20, 23, 24, 151, 200

 Canada, financial assistance from, 70, 75
 Canadian Wheat Board, 199
 Candy, 51, 207
 Canteens: mobile, 166-67; school, 167-68
 Carltona Limited (lawsuit), 134, 194
 Carrots, 34, 52 ff., 59, 63, 112
 Catering establishments, 25, 173, 208-12, 222
 Cathcart, E. P., 34, 143
 Cattle, 6, 34, 36, 38, 41-47 *passim*, 86-90 *passim*, 234
 Cereals Control Board, 12, 17
 Chain stores, *see* Multiple stores
 Chamberlain, Neville, 20, 186, 208, 216
 Channel Islands potatoes, 85
 Cheese, 131, 200
 Churchill, Winston S., 26, 32, 62, 139, 172, 182, 232
 Cocoa, 129
 Cod, salt, 183, 220
 Cod-liver oil, 146-49 *passim*
 Cold stores, 50
 Coller, F. H., 227
 Colwyn Bay, 43, 170, 171
 Combined Food Board, 157, 183-85, 188
 Committee of Imperial Defence, 9, 10, 11, 161, 162, 228
 Commodity directors, *see* Trade directors
 Commodity divisions, 15, 191
 Communal feeding, 165, 172 ff.
 "Concentration" of industry, 131-35
 Consumer-retailer tie, 21, 113; *see also* Registration
 Consumption Levels Inquiries, 157-58, 184, 231
 Consumption policy, 50, 155 ff., 185
 Cooking Depots, 167-68
 Co-operative societies, 96, 103, 133, 138
 Corn, *see* Maize
 Cost-of-living index, 64, 65, 112, 153 ff.
 County War Agricultural Executive Committees, *see* Agricultural Executive Committees

- Coventry, air attack on, 169
 Crackers, *see* Biscuits
- Davis, Joseph S., 187
 Defence Regulations, 95, 195
 Devonport, Lord (Food Controller, 1917), 229
 Diet, United Kingdom wartime, adequacy of, 231-32
 "Dilution" of flour, 179
 Dispersal of food stocks, 161
 Distribution, rationalization of, 107
 Diversion of shipping, 187
 Divisional and local organization of food control, 16
 Dog food, 82
 Dollars, U.S., shortage of, 33, 219, 230
 Dried egg, 183
 Dried fruit, rationing of, 120, 125
 Dried Milk, National, 146-48
 Drummond, Professor (later Sir) J. C., 143, 155
- Economist, The*, 193
 Eggs, 58-64, 158
 Eire, 43
 Elliot, Walter, 143, 144
 Expenditure rationing, 116-17
- Farm machinery, 75-77
 Feedstuffs, animal, 31-35 *passim*, 42-47 *passim*, 57, 59, 88-89, 94, 212-13, 230
 Fertilizers, 72-74
 Fish, 64-69, 220, 226
 Flax, 72
 Flour, 171, 220-21; flour extraction rate, 89, 178-79, 185
 Flour mills, effect of air raids on, 171
Food, Health, and Income (Orr), 141-42
 Food, Ministry of (1917-21), 3-4, 204, 228
 Food Control Committees, 16
 Food (Defence Plans) Department, 9 ff., 93, 140, 142, 162, 197, 199, 200, 204
 Food offices, local, 113, 122, 221
 Food standards, enforcement of, 195
 Ford Motor Company of England, 75
 Foreign exchange, shortage of, 35
 French, Sir Henry, 218
 Fruit, 81
- Goat meat, 182
 Grain trade, 201, 202, 223
- Groundnuts scheme, East African, 54, 229
- Hancock, Professor Sir Keith, 41, 162
 Health, Ministry of, 141, 143, 144, 146, 148
 Health, public, effect of wartime food supplies on, 231
 Hogs, *see* Pigs
 Hot Springs (Va.), Food Conference at, 216, 217
 Hudson, R. S., 43
- Ice cream, 100, 182, 196
 Import program, wartime, 27, 29-30
 Imports, level of food, 27-30, 49-50, 230
 Inland transport difficulties, 49-50
 International Emergency Food Council, 188
 International Wheat Agreement (1942), 187
- Jam, 114, 131
- Kalecki, M., 117
 Keys, Ancel, 158
- Labor, farm, 72, 77-79
 Labour, Ministry of, 152, 153
 Legal aspects of food control, 194-95
 Lend-Lease, 70, 75, 118, 147, 148, 183, 184, 185, 188, 219, 220, 230-31
 Lever Brothers and Unilever, Limited, 13
 Licensing of food undertakings, 198-99
 Livestock, 4, 35, 36, 41-48, 86-90; control scheme, 37-38
 Llewellyn, J. J. (later Lord), 188
 Lobsters and crabs, 210
 Local authorities and communal feeding, 165, 172 ff.
 London, air raids on, 163-65
 Long-term contracts, 199-200, 217
- MacDonald, J. Ramsay, 5, 91
 Maize, 27, 37, 42, 89
 Manpower, 23-107; *see also* Labor
 Manufactured foods, 130-31
 Margarine, 20, 24, 151
 Margins Committee, 198
 Margins of profit, 94-98, 104, 107, 197-98
 Marketing boards: agricultural, 5-6, 13, 17; Milk, 5, 45-46, 88, 91-94, 96, 99, 100, 101, 104, 105; Potato, 81, 150-51

- Meat, 42-43, 200, 208 ff., 223
 Medical Research Council, 156
 Milk, 34, 41, 42, 46, 47, 87-90, 91 ff.; distribution costs, 92; marketing schemes, 6, 88, 91-94; testing scheme, 90
 Ministries, *see* under Agriculture, Food, Labour, etc.
 Morrison, W. S., 19, 95
 Multiple stores, 121, 123, 124, 125
 Munich crisis, 13, 74, 111
 Mussels, bottled, 182
- National Calf Starter, 88
 National Dried Milk, 146-47, 148
 National Farmers' Union, 75, 217, 235
 National Federation of Corn Trade Associations, 201
 National Milk-Cocoa, 150
 National Milk Scheme, 87, 94, 99, 145-47, 217
 National Register, 22, 207
 National Vegetable Marketing Company, 52 ff.
 National Wheatmeal Loaf, 178
 Nutrition, principles of, and food policy, 51, 140 ff., 155 ff.
- Oatmeal, 28, 119, 156
 Oats, 28, 35, 37, 47, 71, 72; in beer, 181; in bread, 180, 181
 Oils and fats, 171-72; *see also* Butter, Margarine, Whale oil
 Onions, 53 ff., 112, 114
 Orange juice, concentrated, 148, 149
 Orders Committee of Ministry of Food, 196
 Orders, Statutory Rules and, 19, 194-97
 Orr, Sir John Boyd (later Lord), 34, 141-43 *passim*, 155, 217
 Orwin, C. S., 5
- Pasteurization of milk, compulsory, 108-09
 Perry Committee on milk distribution, 95 ff.
 Pickles and sauces, 183
 Pigs, 5, 6, 36, 38, 43, 44, 47, 48, 70, 82, 85, 86, 87, 212, 213, 214
 Plowing-up campaign, 31-35, 47, 70-71
 Points rationing, 112, 115, 117 ff., 205, 206, 220, 226
 Potato flour, 179
- Potatoes, 33, 34, 35, 38, 72, 79-86, 183, 222
 Poultry, 28, 48, 59, 86, 214
 Price control, 196-97, 225-26
 Price stabilization, 60, 65, 112, 152 ff.
 Price structure for milk, 103-07
 Prisoners of war, employment of, 79
 Production, agricultural, 31-48 *passim*, 70-90 *passim*, 230
 Profits, *see* Margins of profit
 Pulses, 119
- Queen's Messenger Convoys*, 167
- Ration books, 25-26, 113, 149, 150
 Rationalization of milk distribution, 103-07
 Rationing, 9, 12, 13, 19-26, 111 ff., 203 ff., 228, 229, 230, 232-33; of bread, 220-22; of feedstuffs, 42, 45, 212-13; of potatoes, 84; of meat, 208 ff.; of milk, 102; of tea, 206
 Registrar-General, the, 207
 Registration of consumers with retailers, 21, 113, 203, 205, 206, 207, 212
 Remuneration of controlled firms, 201-02; *see also* Margins of profit
 Restaurant meals: control of, 182, 208-12 *passim*; proposal to ration, 129, 182, 210-11
 Retailers, control of supplies to, 21, 203-08
 Rhondda, Viscount (second Food Controller, 1917), 51, 218, 224
 Rye in the loaf, 181
- Salaman, Redcliffe N., 82
 Salmon: canned, 127; smoked, 182
 Salvage of food damaged by enemy action, 170-71
 Scientific advice, influence of, 35, 52-53, 81-82
 Scientific Food Committee, 34, 52, 81
 Scotland, 196, 233
 Self-suppliers, 212-15, 233-34
 Sheep, 6, 36, 38, 44, 47, 70, 214
 Shelter feeding in air raids, 166
 Shipping, 37, 177, 183
 Simon, Sir John (later Viscount), 152
 "Slaughter policy," 41-48
 Smith, Henry, 153
 Smith, Sir Ben, 218
 Snoek, 220
 Soap, 135, 188, 203

- Soft drinks, 134-35, 201
 Starling, E. H., 159
 Statutory Rules and Orders, 19, 194-97
 Stock levels, minimum, 184-87
 Stocks, prewar security, 8-9, 13-15
 Strachey, John, 214, 218, 219-20, 223, 232
 Subsidies, agricultural, 6-7, 39-40; cost-of-living, 150-55, 220, 223
 Substitutes, food, 131, 132
 Sugar, 6-7, 14, 20, 130, 131, 152, 201, 204
 Sugar beet, 6, 71, 85
 Supply, Ministry of, 72, 73, 76
 Surveys of food consumption, 156 ff.
- Tawney, R. H., 226-27
 Tea, 24-25, 151, 196, 203, 206
 Titmuss, R. M., 141, 149, 163
 Tobacco, 153
 Tractors, *see* Farm machinery
 Trade, Board of, 75, 117, 132
 Trade Directors in Ministry of Food, 15-16, 17, 136, 191-92
 Transport, inland, economy in, 131, 135-39
 Transport, Ministry of, 136, 194
 Travelers' rations, 21
 Treasury, H. M., 7, 37, 39, 60, 144, 152, 155
- United States, 177, 183, 184, 185, 188;
 Department of Agriculture, 141;
 Food and Nutrition Board, 158
 Utility-clothing scheme, 154
- Variety in diet, 183
 Victory dishes, 183
 Vitamins, 80, 146, 147-50
- Wages, agricultural, 39, 40
 Wartime companies and associations, 201-02
 Welfare Food Scheme, 149-50
 Wells, H. G., 236
 Whale oil, 14, 15, 171-72
 Wheat, 6, 8, 14, 27, 28, 33, 37, 38, 39, 47, 70, 71, 72, 85, 186-87
 Wheat Commission, 6
 Wholesalers, 122, 123, 124, 137, 204
 Williams, Tom, 219
 Women's Land Army, 77, 78, 84
 Women's Voluntary Services for Civil Defence, 167
 Wood, Sir Kingsley, 152
 Woolton, Lord, 24, 43, 51, 53, 54, 59, 62, 63, 95, 97, 116, 135, 172, 173, 174, 190, 192, 218, 220, 223, 224
- Zoning of food deliveries, 66-68, 127, 135-39

