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# THE HOME FRONT IN WAR

## II.—FOOD CONTROL

### A PRECAUTIONARY POLICY OUTLINED

*Below is the second article by Sir William Beveridge, who brings his War-time experience in the Ministries of Munitions and of Food to bear on precautions for civilian defence, and the need for adjusting peace policy to war plans.*

**By Sir William Beveridge**

The indirect attack on the home front through food supplies has to be met by measures of food control. In part these will be concerned with problems made familiar by the last War: a shortage of supplies in the country as a whole, threatening a rise of prices and unequal distribution. But there will also be new problems: aerial attack at the outbreak of war on particular ports, stores, and means of transport may threaten local famines. If aerial warfare is not decided instantly and finally in favour of the fighter as against the bomber, there may be recurrence of such attacks, perhaps throughout the whole of a long war.

It may be assumed that a Food Controller with full powers will be appointed as soon as a new war becomes certain. In the last War, delay in establishing general food control led to the imported meat supplies of civilians and armed forces alike being controlled primarily in the interests of the armed forces by the Board of Trade; it led to sugar and wheat being controlled by independent commissions without statutory powers, whose relation to the later Food Controller remained obscure to the last. These elements of faulty coordination need not and should not be repeated in a new war.

On the day on which war becomes certain the Food Controller must step in, with a feeding policy (a) which has been thought out in advance, and (b) to which the peace-time development of agriculture has been adjusted. He must step in also with complete plans for controlling each particular food as control becomes necessary, and with an organization to deal with the initial emergencies of aerial attack on towns. Feeding policy and food organization react on each other, but may in the first instance be considered separately.

### FEEDING POLICY

Feeding policy must provide both for a short war and a long war, and must cover decisions on the following, among other matters:—

1. Nature of war-time diet to be aimed at and minimum requirements of each type of food.
2. Degree of dependence on imports and home production for each food.
3. Policy and methods of storage of reserves in peace.

4. A "shadow scheme" for the largest possible expansion of agricultural production in war, when money cost will be of little account, but shipping and foreign exchange become steadily scarcer.

The first of these matters involves a survey of food consumption and requirements such as was made by the Food (War) Committee of the Royal Society in the last War, carried into much greater detail. But it is not simply a question

for experts on nutrition. It involves consideration also of the sources from which various foods come and their relative distances from Britain, of the degree to which these different sources are likely to become inaccessible in war, and of the possibilities of replacing one food by another, according as it becomes more important to economize on tonnage or foreign exchange or man-power.

That is to say, the first question, of national dietary, leads directly to the second, of relation between imports and home production. In answering each question, regard must be had to the fact that any form of home production which depends largely either on feeding stuffs or on fertilizers from overseas is not a safeguard against starvation or a saving of imports. A ton of imported feeding stuffs yields less in food value than a ton of grain for human consumption; it yields very much less than a ton of meat or edible fats. From this point of view the terms of reference of the newly created Food (Defence Plans) Department call for comment. The Department is made responsible for supply control and distribution in war, both of food and of feeding stuffs for animals. But animals are not citizens; feeding stuffs for animals are required only as a means to human food. Animals compete with human beings directly in many forms of consumption—notably of wheat, barley, oats—and, in so far as they depend on imports, they compete for tonnage. All animals, moreover, are in varying degrees wasteful converters of energy. To what extent the supply of feeding stuffs for animals should be maintained in war is a matter for inquiry. The reference to the Food (Defence Plans) Department is right in making it clear that the Department has authority over feeding stuffs as well as food. It should not be allowed to suggest that food and feeding stuffs stand on the same level.

In regard to feeding stuffs, perhaps the most important service the Department could render would be to explore the possibility of our becoming less dependent on imports, by making better use than now of the chief feeding crop that we grow at home—namely, grass. Our traditional method of preserving grass for the winter, by haymaking, is extraordinarily wasteful of its feeding value. To cut grass young, before it has become fibrous, and dry it artificially preserves this value to a remarkable extent. The economics of the drying process needs further investigation. There is at least a *prima facie* case for thinking that general installation of grass-drying plants, in place of haymaking, might prove to be both a gain in peace and among the most important steps open to us for greater safety in war. It involves not just the making of plans for war pigeon-holes nor the subsidizing of farmers to continue on traditional lines, but a change of agricultural methods now. This, however, under existing arrangements, is the responsibility not of the Food (Defence Plans) Department of the Board of Trade, but of the Ministry of Agriculture in England and Wales, of the Department of Agriculture for Scotland, and of yet another authority in Northern Ireland.

### STORAGE OF RESERVES

The third of the issues involved in feeding policy is the storage of reserves in peace. As was made clear by Sir Thomas Inskip in the last debate, this is a matter which has long been under consideration by the Government; for intelligible reasons it has not been made equally clear what decision, if any, has been taken. The question of storage has to be looked at from many points of view; only two can be mentioned here. First, to deal with the local famines that may result immediately from aerial attack, without general shortage in the country, the Government must have stocks well distributed, at its instant command, and in a form suited to rapid transport and consumption in conditions which may

resemble those of a battlefield. In two ways, indeed, comparison with a battlefield understates the problem. The organization of cities for supply of food, light, heat, and shelter is more complex and more vulnerable than the organization of armies in the field; and the people to be fed will not be all adults in the prime of life; there will be children of all ages down to infancy for whose feeding special rations—preserved milk or milk powder—will be indispensable. Secondly, storage is not the only way of keeping reserves for war-time consumption. A substantial reserve of food for man is carried automatically in the grain which goes normally to feed animals or to make beer or spirit. By lengthening the extraction of flour from wheat and by dilution of wheat with barley (diverted from pigs and beer) the supply of cereals for human consumption can be increased materially. Another possibility lies in peace-time increase of our flocks and herds, with a view to killing them down in war. If, for instance, our dairy herd were brought to a point much higher than at present, with a correspondingly increased consumption of milk and dairy products in peace-time, the herd itself would form a reserve stock of meat for war-time. In this and in other ways the treatment of livestock is the crux of war-time feeding policy. The war-time policy must be considered only from the point of view of war and not of peace-time customs or preferences. But the peace-time policy must be such as to fit in with war plans and ease war problems.

#### A LONG WAR

The fourth requisite—of a "shadow scheme" for manifold increase of agricultural production—is of importance mainly in anticipation of a long war. Anticipations that the war will be a short one can hardly be more confident than they were in 1914, and may be as badly mistaken. Bearing in mind the possibility of a long war, it is more important to devise, if possible, a means of manifold expansion of agricultural production in war-time than to increase production slightly in peace. The preparation of such a shadow scheme may, however, involve in peace, not only laboratory research, but practical experiment on a substantial scale. The possibilities of Stapledon grass need to be brought to the test of large-scale exploitation on special estates. The potato, as an article whose production can be increased enormously without imports and without using up skilled labour, may be of great importance in a shadow scheme, if adequate means of preservation (in potato flour) can be devised and prepared. These are two illustrations only out of many that might be given. But, apart from such research, it is essential to weave together war-time plans and peace-time development in agriculture, to tell all landowners and farmers now what they ought to be doing for better preparedness and to persuade and help them to do it.

The Food Controller, as stated above, must step in at the outbreak of war, not only with a feeding policy, but with a food organization. This term is used to cover both (i) detailed plans for the control of each individual food, including the terms of taking over stocks, imports, flour mills, and other establishments concerned in handling or preparing food, and (ii) an organization to carry out these plans as action on them becomes necessary and to deal with the initial emergency of aerial attack.

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## SUBSIDIES AND PRICES

As to the first of these items, there is experience to draw on from the last War. Here it is sufficient to point out that each food needs individual treatment, in so far as its sources of supply and machinery of distribution are different; and that some foods will have to be dealt with more urgently than others. It is by no means clear that control of every essential food need come early in a new war. But for some foods instant action is likely to be required. A good illustration is afforded by bacon, now largely imported from Scandinavia. In a European war these imports might stop almost at once and acute shortage would result. With regard to the second of these items, there is presumably something also to build on from the last war, or at least from the civil emergencies which followed it. There is or should be a skeleton organization of central and district officers already designated to take instant charge of the food situation.

In concluding the subject of food control, it is worth while to refer to one question which is an issue both of feeding policy and of organization, and which brings food into relation to wider problems of finance. This is the question of subsidies and food prices. In the late War there was a bread subsidy but no subsidies for other foods. The retail price of bread from September, 1917, was fixed at an arbitrary point, irrespective of the cost to the Government of the materials and manufacture; the difference was met as one of the general costs of the War from loans and taxation. The retail prices of all other important foods were controlled by the Ministry of Food on the basis of covering costs of materials and reasonable returns to manufacturers and distributors. These prices naturally rose while that of bread remained fixed, and the rising cost of food led to rising wages. Before a new war (in which the scope of communal feeding is likely to be much greater than before) it will be desirable to consider afresh the policy of subsidies in relation alike to consumption, to prices and wages, and to general financial policy. It might even seem worth while to attempt to keep the cost of living constant.

*To be concluded*

The first article appeared yesterday.

## THREATENED OAKS AT WINDERMERE

FROM OUR CORRESPONDENT

KENDAL, FEB. 22

The felling of 400 ancient oak trees near Wray Castle, on the shores of Windermere, seems to be unavoidable. Mr. C. C. Halliday, of Lancaster, the owner of the Wray estate, had decided to fell the trees, complaining that cattle were poisoned by eating the acorns. He offered to reprieve some of the trees if the National Trust would undertake to collect the acorns.

Mr. Bruce Logan Thompson, Northern representative of the National Trust, after a committee meeting at Ambleside to-day, stated that it was impossible to accept Mr. Halliday's offer. He said: "We have quite enough to do looking after our own property in the Lake district without having to go collecting acorns on privately owned land."

## MR. GEOFFREY LLOYD ON AIR RAID PRECAUTIONS

Mr. Geoffrey Lloyd, M.P., Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Home Affairs, addressing a by-election meeting at Richmond last night, said that with regard to air raid precautions the Government's plans were making much greater progress than many people supposed. Public announcements would shortly be made with regard to measures for dealing with incendiary bombs and the organization of a system of air raid wardens.

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