

# THE HOME FRONT IN WAR

## I.—SECURITY AND PROGRESS

### A DOUBLE GOAL

*The following is the first of three articles in which the writer, who held responsible positions during the War in the Ministries of Munitions and of Food, considers measures—many of them dictated alike by the aims of security in war and efficiency in peace—that could and should be taken for the organization of the "home front."*

By Sir William Beveridge

In the view of some authorities, events on the home front in the last War were not merely important but decisive. On March 16, 1921, *The Times* said of Lord Rhondda in a leading article that he "was there to carry out a duty on the proper execution of which the safety of the country depended, even more than on the triumph of its naval and military forces." And Mr. Lloyd George in his "War Memoirs" (Vol. 6, page 3,408), writes:—

Governments have the entire responsibility for the home front. That front is always underrated by Generals in the field. And yet that is where the Great War was won and lost. The Russian, Bulgarian, Austrian, and German home fronts fell to pieces before their armies collapsed. The averting of that great and irrevocable catastrophe is the concern of the Government. Great care must be taken of the condition and susceptibilities of the population at home, who make it possible to maintain, to reinforce, and to equip armies. All the suffering is not in the trenches. The most poignant suffering is not on the battlefield, but in the bereft hearths and hearts in the homeland. If in addition to the anguish of grief women have to witness the pinched faces and waning strength of their children there will soon be trouble in the nation behind the line, and if men home on leave have to carry back these unnerving memories to the trenches their will to fight on is enfeebled.

This is probably an exaggeration as to the War of 1914-18. If we should be driven into a new war, it may be no more than the truth. For four reasons the home front seems destined to be more important in a new war than it was in the last War.

1. In a new war the civilian population may be subject to direct attack from aircraft, to an extent unparalleled in the past, and the issue of the conflict may turn on the extent to which this direct attack on homes can be foiled, not merely by military defence, but by fighting fire and gas or by evacuation to places of greater safety.

2. The former indirect attack on the civilian population through the food supply may take a new form; food and its transport will be targets not merely on their way to Britain but in Britain.

3. Fighting itself will be more mechanized and technical; for every soldier, sailor, and airman at the war front there will be more men and women than before at the home front in factories.

4. A direct attack on the home front may come early, with no need for preliminary breaking of the military front; according to some authorities, it is against the home front that the knock-out blow of the first days and weeks is likely to be directed.

### LOGIC, NOT ALARMISM

No one can say in advance just how much those four new conditions may make to the experience of the last War and the

the home front, is certain. Mr. Lloyd George speaks of men in the last War carrying back to the trenches unhealing memories of hunger at home. In a new war they may have to carry not memories of distress, but haunting fears of disaster. In the last War families waited for bad news about their fighting men in the trenches; in a new war fighting men may wait for bad news about their families at home. To use such phrases is not to be an alarmist. If now we prepare at all for a new war, we must prepare as best we can for the worst possibilities, however unlikely we think them. If we prepare at all for a new war, we must prepare completely, not on the military front alone. The motive of all that is written here is not alarmism, but logic.

We are now devoting immense effort and expenditure to military defence. Unless we cover the home front as well, all this effort may be futile, and the expenditure will be wasted. Accordingly it is proposed in these articles to examine briefly some of the problems of defence on the home front and the conditions of safety there. To make a practical examination of such problems is not to assume the certainty or the probability of war. Nor does it imply a belief that all these problems are now being neglected by the Government: obviously that is not so. But, for reasons which will appear in the articles themselves, it may be doubted whether defence on the home front is yet assured of that degree either of attention or of coordination which is the logical counterpart of our military preparations. The topic has been strangely neglected in recent debates by nearly all speakers on both sides of the House of Commons.

The remainder of the present article is concerned with problems of direct attack on civilians; the second article will deal with indirect attack through food supply. The third article, after referring to such matters as transport, finance, and the terms of national service in war, will lead to the conclusion that the general condition of safety on the home front is that the problems of the home front should be studied intensively, authoritatively, and as a whole. It will lead also to the conclusion that many, if not most, of the civilian measures now needed to make us safer in war are measures already overdue for making us happier in peace.

### SAFEGUARDING CIVILIANS

Nothing need be said here of measures of military defence against aerial attack (by aeroplanes, guns, or balloon barrage) or of measures such as the provision of gas masks. These matters are clearly receiving attention. It will be sufficient to name, as illustrations of the general theme, three other matters which, so far as can be seen, have not received the attention they deserve.

The first point arises out of the possibility that, if war comes at all, it may come first in the form of aerial attack upon civilian populations in great cities. If we mean to face this possibility, we cannot wait till the outbreak of war to enlist and train the forces needed for civilian aid and defence. There must be men (and probably women also) ready on the first day of war to take part in fighting fire or gas, to give first aid to sufferers, to instruct and assist the civilian population in self-protection, to maintain sanitation and food supplies, and, if necessary, to remove families from areas of special danger. They must be ready to do this, not as individuals, but as a force already trained and disciplined and ample in numbers. This means that some proportion of those who are withdrawn from civilian life before war, in effect some proportion of any peace-time army, should be trained, not only or mainly in military exercises, to fight the enemy as soldiers, sailors, or airmen, but should be trained and organized for civilian aid in cities. No doubt, as with the Army in the ordinary sense, it will be possible

and necessary to add to the peace-time force trained reserves or fresh volunteers who, in the circumstances assumed, will be obtained without difficulty. But these cannot be ready as a disciplined force in the first days and weeks of war. Promptitude in this matter is vital. Obvious promptitude in dealing with any initial attack may have a psychological importance exceeding its immediate practical service, however great.

In spite of the gloomy anticipations of some writers on aerial warfare, it may well happen that the direct destruction that can be wrought in a large city even by successful aerial attacks will prove relatively small. The major risk of such attacks may be found, not in the direct damage done, but in the starting of disastrous panics and stampedes to leave areas supposed to be dangerous. The best safeguard against panic is that the Government of that day should be able to give the impression that they have thought out in advance every problem to be solved, that they have measures to deal with each new emergency as it arises, that they will in due course secure to every citizen his fair share of organized defence and aid.

The second requirement suggested here is for a detailed and comprehensive survey of all the economic activities in any area which may be regarded as specially vulnerable to attack. Exactly how that area should be defined is a matter on which outsiders, ignorant of the relative defensibility of places at different distances from our coasts and of different degrees of urban concentration, cannot give a useful judgment. In the district served by the London Passenger Transport Board there are now 9,500,000 inhabitants. On some assumptions nearly the whole of this district is a danger area—i.e., an area in which economic activities will run special risks of being stopped, either by direct attack or as the result of organized evacuation or unorganized flight of many inhabitants. The unsuitability of such a situation as Woolwich as a munition centre in a new war has been recognized. But in this matter to concentrate attention on munition factories is to neglect the home front. Every factory and place of employment in a dangerous area must be considered from the standpoint of whether it can or cannot be stopped without harm. In that consideration the intricate interdependence of the different units of the present economic structure is of fundamental importance. It will almost certainly be found that Greater London contains, not only an excessive proportion of stores of food and of many other necessities, but also that scattered over its immense area are factories making some apparently unimportant parts of machines or chemical products whose failure would cause a breakdown elsewhere.

The action to be taken as the result of such a survey depends, of course, upon the results of the survey itself. Clearly, we must make certain that nothing essential for food supplies or any other purpose of civilian life remains concentrated to an excessive extent in any area which the experts tell us is dangerous. We must plan to readjust storage, transport, and distribution of all necessities to a drastic diversion of shipping. We must think of evacuation not simply as a problem of getting people out of danger, but in terms of what they will do after they have moved and of the economic disorganization that their going will cause.

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**GROWTH OF LONDON**  
The third suggestion is that some effective steps should be taken forthwith to stop the further growth of London. During the last 10 years, through the deterioration of international relations, the possibility of a new war has grown greater. During the same period the vulnerability of Britain's economic structure in such a war as may come upon us has also grown with the expansion of London, and is still being allowed to grow. Successive Governments stand by, while the attraction of the large market concentrates more and more of our production and population in that part of the country where, for nearly every reason of peace and for every reason of war, concentration is least desirable.

The contingency of war was symbolized on January 1 last by the dropping of insurance of war risks from all policies underwritten by way of private business. The State will almost certainly have to provide air-risk insurance in any new war as it did shipping insurance in the last War. Ought not the Government now to announce that State insurance against aerial attack will not apply to any new place of employment established without a licence in a given area? Ought it not to go beyond that negative stage and control, in the interests of both a better country in peace and a safer country in war, the location of industry?

The difficulty of any action of the kind is that it interferes with economic values; it lowers the value of land and houses in the danger area, and increases values outside. Recently the site of Westminster Hospital was bought by a builder for £350,000 with a view to erecting thereon a new vast set of business offices. The effect is to add to the number of clerks who will live round London and travel to and from Westminster; that is to say, the effect is to increase the vulnerability of London. But if the builder were not allowed to proceed with his scheme the value of the purchase would probably fall from £350,000 to £150,000 or less. This illustration is given to show the difficulty of making the country less vulnerable. It does not dispose of the necessity for doing so.

### ON THE THAMES

Almost simultaneously with the announcement last May of a committee to devise rationing machinery and other steps to provide for the feeding of the country in war, there was an announcement of the decision taken by the Port of London Authority to spend another £12,000,000 in developing the Port of London and improving its facilities. This £12,000,000 spent in London is no doubt useful in peace, but might prove useless in war. The same sum spent in a western port would be useful in war as well as in peace. It is a minor point, illustrative of the planless nature of all our proceedings on the home front, that while the Port of London is being developed and while millions are being spent on roads outside London, hardly any improvements have yet been made of roads in the port area itself. Traffic round the docks is in an appalling and chronic state of congestion.

In *The Times* of December 22 last was announced the formation of the Thames-side Industrial Development Board, supported by the Essex and Kent County Councils and many other local authorities, with a view to safeguarding the position of industries carried on near the Thames. The object is not to safeguard the industries in time of war, but to increase the

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number of industries in the London area. The view taken, according to the report, is that the location of industry is not a matter for arbitrary settlement by the Government, and that the business man, after weighing all the facts regarding particular sites, should be allowed to locate his factory in an area which will bring him a reasonable return on his outlay.

The Government is to stand helpless by while individual interest under conditions of *laissez-faire* increases the unpreparedness of the country for war.

To be continued