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BLOCKADE
AND THE CIVILIAN
POPULATION

By
Sir WILLIAM BEVERIDGE



**OXFORD PAMPHLETS
ON WORLD AFFAIRS**

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No. 24

BLOCKADE
AND THE
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SIR WILLIAM BEVERIDGE

OXFORD
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IN this Pamphlet Sir William Beveridge examines the question of the effect of the Anglo-French 'Blockade' on the civilian population in Germany, from the legal, humanitarian, and economic standpoints. He shows that the exclusion from Germany of fats—the one food of which her home production is seriously inadequate—is an essential war measure, because fats are directly convertible into armaments. Further, the exclusion of all imports is not only legally permissible, but is justifiable on the ground that it prevents the Nazi Government from feeding both their people and their guns. In any case, the hunger of the German people depends upon the decision of their Government, for nothing we can do by way of blockade is likely to make it impossible for the German population to be fed, if their Government devotes to this purpose enough of their total resources of man-power, materials, and money.

Further information on the economic side of the war is to be found in Oxford Pamphlets Nos. 17, 19, and 23 (*see back of cover*).

Sir William Beveridge, who has been Master of University College, Oxford, since 1937, held important economic posts under the Government in the last war (including that of Permanent Secretary to the Ministry of Food), and was Director of the London School of Economics from 1919-37. He is the author of many standard works on economic subjects.

NOTE

Part of this pamphlet appeared as an article in *The Times* of 26 October 1939. I am much indebted to *The Times* for permission to draw freely upon what I published there.

W. B.

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A list of the Oxford Pamphlets will be found on the back of the cover.

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Economic Warfare

IN the war of 1914-18 the belligerents on each side attempted, to the limits of their power, to keep all goods of all kinds from reaching their opponents. Germany for this purpose used submarine warfare, extended at the beginning of 1917 to the sinking at sight and without warning of all ships, whether enemy or neutral, that she could find in the waters surrounding the British Isles; Germany was driven to these methods by the British command of the seas. Britain, by the fact that Germany was not an island but was surrounded by many neutral countries, was driven to extensions in other directions of the normal procedure of blockade. She came in due course, not merely to prohibit any importation direct into Germany, but to limit importation of all kinds into neutral countries. The German blockade, after a brief period of threatening success in April 1917, failed. The British blockade succeeded; it is commonly regarded as having been one of the strongest weapons in the British armoury.¹

In the present war the same attempt is being revived on each side. Germany has begun already to sink ships without warning and without possibility of determining the nature of their cargoes,

¹ The operations on both sides are described in No. 17 of the Oxford Pamphlets: *The Blockade 1914-19*, by W. Arnold-Forster.

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and to sink neutral ships as well as Allied ships; in unrestricted mine warfare she has added to her former methods a new departure from accepted rules of war. Britain, in place of the slow development of a Ministry of Blockade, which in the last war came only after two full years of war, has established from the outset a Ministry of Economic Warfare, which has already embarked upon the delicate processes of long-distance blockade through neutrals, on the declaration as contraband, whether absolute or conditional, of a wide range of articles, and on the attempt to stop all exports from Germany across the sea.

The Soviet Protest

In the war of 1914-18, Britain's procedure led to repeated protests from the U.S.A. in defence of the freedom of the seas, and to periods of acute tension which were relieved only by the still greater dislike of the U.S.A. for the methods used by Germany. In the present war the part of protester played before by the U.S.A. has been taken by another neutral, Russia. In a note of 25 October 1939 the Soviet Government have raised objections against two British Notes of 6 and 11 September defining contraband of war and establishing control of merchant ships of neutral countries. The text of this protest, so far as it relates to the definition of contraband, is reproduced below:

The announcement, by unilateral Act, of the British Government's list of goods proclaimed to be contraband of war in the Note of September 6, violates the principles

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of international law, which found their general expression in the international declaration of the regulations of naval warfare of February 26, 1909, gravely impairs the interests of neutral countries, and destroys international trade.

By including in its lists of war contraband such articles and goods as fuel, paper, cotton, fodder for livestock, footwear, clothing and materials for its manufacture, and even all foodstuffs—bread, meat, butter, sugar, and other foods—the British Government in fact proclaims as contraband the basic articles of mass consumption and creates the possibility of unlimited arbitrariness in classing all articles of popular consumption as contraband.

This inevitably leads to profound disorganization of the supply of necessities to the peaceful civilian population, gravely endangers the health and lives of the peaceful population, and portends innumerable calamities for the masses of the people.

It is known that the universally recognized principles of international law do not permit the air bombardment of the peaceful population, women, children, and aged people.

On the same grounds the Soviet Government deem it not permissible to deprive the peaceful population of foodstuffs, fuel, and clothing, and thus subject children, women, and aged people and invalids to every hardship and starvation by proclaiming the goods of popular consumption as war contraband.

Proceeding from the above, the Soviet Government declare that they do not agree to the Note of the British Government of September 6 and refuse to recognize any validity of this Note.

Blockade and Contraband in International Law

The Soviet Note, it will be seen, declares that proclamation as contraband of 'the basic articles of

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mass consumption is contrary to international law and draws a parallel between 'the air bombardment of the peaceful population, women, children, and aged people', and the depriving of such peaceful population of the necessaries of life.

It may be said at once that the cutting off of necessaries from the civilian population of an enemy, as well as from the fighting forces, is procedure fully sanctioned by international law. In the siege of a city, such as that which reduced Paris in 1870, the besieger is under no obligation to let supplies for civilians enter the city or to permit the civilians themselves to escape; on the contrary, it is laid down by high modern authority that 'should the commander of a besieged place expel the non-combatants, in order to lessen the number of those who consume his store of provisions, the besieging force need not allow them to pass through its lines, but may drive them back'.¹ The laws of blockade differ from those of siege, but not in requiring greater tenderness among belligerents. The problems that arise on blockade turn, not on the claims of humanity, but on the rights of neutrals, and on the degree and form of permissible interference with their trade. The right by technically effective blockade of a country to stop ingress and egress of every kind is unquestioned.

Technically effective blockade is impossible for either belligerent in the present war. The proce-

¹ Oppenheim's *International Law*, 4th edition, by A. D. McNair, vol. ii, p. 283. The besieger may cut off the water-supply of the besieged, if he can, though he may not poison it.

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ture adopted by Britain in 1914-18, and being renewed in the present war, is not technically blockade at all. Strictly, it is the application of a different part of international law—that of contraband. But the use of the term 'blockade' has become so general and so convenient that it can hardly be avoided. And in past discussions of contraband, as of blockade, the legal issue has always been, not one of humanity as between belligerents, but one of the rights and responsibilities of neutrals. A policy of depriving the civilians as well as the military forces of an enemy of the necessaries of life as a means of securing his surrender is in accord with international law. It is also the policy adopted by Germany in this war and in the last, so far as her power extends. Nevertheless, it is worth while to examine the policy on its merits. Is there a case for making British policy in this respect more humane than that of Germany and more humane than the law and practice of sieges or blockades ?

The case may be put not on grounds of humanity alone but of expediency. From the military point of view, the more complete the blockade, the better. From other points of view, there may be disadvantages to be weighed against the military advantage; in particular there may be disadvantages in extending the contraband list to cover food of every kind. Such action by Britain can be used as basis of a charge that she is waging war on women and children; in so far as the charge is believed, this will militate against efforts to detach the German people from desperate support of the German Government.

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It gives arguments to isolationists in America, as it has to the Soviet Government; it may embroil Britain with other neutrals; it will be used by the enemy to justify the indiscriminate bombing of civilian populations, if and when they think that it is likely to be effective as a method of warfare. They will say, as the Soviet Government has said, that there is no difference between killing civilians by bombs and killing them by hunger blockade. In the circumstances it is worth while to examine carefully the policy of blockade in relation to foodstuffs.

The problem can be approached from three angles: First, we have to ask how far it is possible to distinguish between food and armaments; to what extent can foodstuffs be converted to alternative use as weapons of war? Second, we have to ask how far it is possible to distinguish between food for military and for civilian needs. Third, we have to ask how far and under what circumstances a British blockade can force starvation or severe privation upon the peaceful population of Germany.

Foodstuffs and Armaments

The answer to the first question involves a division of foodstuffs into three main categories: fats, starch, and miscellaneous,

(1) Fats

Fats, broadly speaking, are all directly convertible into munitions, because they can be used, and are very largely used, in making propellants. They are not literally indispensable for this purpose. The

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glycerine which they yield as the basis of nitro-glycerine can, as is pointed out below, be obtained from sugar or grain. There are even some propellants not involving any glycerine at all. The American Army in the last war used one of these—a pure nitro-cellulose powder known as N. C. T. But the easy manufacture of such powder requires cellulose in a pure form, which the people of America have at hand in cotton fibre, but which is not readily available in large quantities in Europe. It is possible by a somewhat elaborate process to extract pure cellulose from wood pulp, and it is likely that the Germans are doing this, in order to supplement their supply of propellant from other sources, as, no doubt, they are basing some of their nitro-glycerine on sugar or starch. But failing pure cellulose, fat is the cheapest and most convenient material for propellant; fat would be used by the Germans for this purpose, if they could get it.

The famous alternative of 'guns or butter' put by Field-Marshal Goering is truer than most people understand. There has been shortage of fats for human consumption in Germany ever since 1932, that is to say, ever since just before the Nazi Party came to power. The shortage cannot have been due to British blockade. It has been due to the policy of the German Government, or rather to two related policies—of self-sufficiency and rearmament. The working of these policies is shown statistically below. Here we are concerned with the physical fact that fats are literally, not guns indeed, but the favourite food of guns in the form of propellant. To allow

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Germany to import oil-seeds, lard, bacon, or butter would be to allow her to import commodities which can be turned directly into munitions, and undoubtedly would be so turned, even at the cost of causing privation to the women and children of Germany. In another respect also fats are more nearly munitions than are other foods. While a small amount of fat is essential in every diet, large supplies of fat are of special value as sources of energy for physical toil; fat is needed above all by soldiers and for heavy work in factories and in transport.

(2) Starch

Wheat and all other grains, as well as potatoes and sugar, through their starch content, can be used to yield alcohol, which is a fuel for tanks and lorries, as well as a solvent for high explosives. The amount of alcohol that can be obtained in this way is substantial, in relation to the quantity of starch consumed; a few handfuls of wheat might yield enough alcohol to take a lorry a mile or more. The obstacles to general use of grain for production of alcohol are the high cost of the material, the difficulty of transport in sufficient quantities, and, to a less extent, the size rather than the complexity of the plant required. Foods of this group can also be made to yield acetone and glycerine. During the war of 1914-18 Germany developed a large production of glycerine by fermentation of sugar solutions. Starch of any kind, from potatoes or grain, can be adapted for use in the same way. All grain can by

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another indirect route be turned into munitions, by being used as feeding-stuffs for animals, which ultimately yield animal fats.

(3) Miscellaneous

The miscellaneous group includes fish, milk, eggs, dried fruit, and vegetables other than potatoes. Theoretically, some even of these apparently innocent foods may become explosives. Nitro-glycerine can be got from milk or from the sugar in dried fruits. But the practical possibilities of such conversion are probably small. On the other hand the practical operation of sea blockade in relation to such foods is also small. They are not the subject of large import into Germany from overseas.

Foodstuffs in the first and second groups are alike capable of large import from overseas, that is to say, their supply to Germany can be influenced directly by blockade. They are also capable of direct conversion into weapons of war. The practical and economic obstacles to conversion are much greater in the second group than in the first group. But it is clear that any food import which could be allowed by British blockade policy might be used to increase German armaments. Even if it were not converted directly, it might release other food which could be converted.

Military and Civilian Supplies

The second approach to the problem lies in asking whether it is possible to distinguish between imports of food for the military forces and for the civilian

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population. The answer is that it is impossible to make any real distinction, and that for two reasons. In the first place, in totalitarian war very few of the inhabitants of a belligerent country can be regarded as peaceful, that is to say, as not engaged in the war. The men in uniform who work behind the lines, in the commissariat or in maintenance and repair of the machines of war, are recognized portions of the military forces. But the man or woman making nitro-glycerine or turning shells, though not wearing a uniform, is not occupied in tasks of peace. Nor are the people digging coal or weaving textiles whose export will finance the purchase of munitions from abroad. Nor really is any person who is producing any commodity or rendering any service to the community at war. The nation would be less dangerous in war without them. In totalitarian war no one is peaceful, except the owners of useless mouths, the unemployed, the sick, aged, and infirm, the children and young persons below military or working age, and the women who look after them.

In the next place, in regard to any particular import of food it is impossible to say whether it is likely to go to persons engaged in works of peace or to the military forces or to the munition makers. To whichever it goes, it strengthens the war effort of the country which receives it; even if used for the 'peaceful population' it releases for the military forces food which otherwise they would not have enjoyed.

In the wars of the nineteenth century and before

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it appeared possible to draw a distinction, for purposes of contraband, between food intended for the maintenance of armies and other food. During the South African War in 1900 Lord Salisbury laid it down that 'Foodstuffs, with a hostile destination, can be considered as contraband of war only if they are supplies for the enemy's forces. It is not sufficient that they are capable of being so used; it must be shown that this was in fact their destination at the time of the seizure.' This declaration was quoted by the United States in one of their protests to the British Government at the end of 1914. Needless to say, it is being used by German propagandists to-day.¹

Contraband in Totalitarian War

But, as Germans and British alike know from their own practice, what Lord Salisbury said in 1900 has no application to the facts of to-day. In totalitarian war the distinction between absolute and conditional contraband applied to food supplies is out of date. If it could be shown that all provisions imported into the territory of a belligerent state would be likely to minister to the needs of

¹ e.g. in a Hamburg broadcast of 12 Nov. 1939 attacking an article by myself published in *The Times* of 26 Oct., and *The Times* leading article of the following day. By the United States of America (in a telegram dated 26 Dec. 1914, from Mr. W. J. Bryan, State Secretary, to Mr. W. H. Page) Lord Salisbury's declaration was used, not as an argument against treating foodstuffs as contraband, but to show that no presumption of the enemy destination of conditional contraband ought to be raised from the fact of its **consignment to a neutral port 'to order'**.

its military and naval forces by reason of a general shortage of foodstuffs, the attempts of neutral traders to ship such articles to that territory would constitute participation in the war and transform that traffic into one of contraband.' 'As war is now conducted it is a probability rather than a possibility that foodstuffs imported into belligerent territory will serve a military end and so be used for a hostile purpose.' These conclusions of one of the highest American authorities, Professor C. C. Hyde, are the more interesting, because in other matters, such as the arming of merchantmen, he does not take the English view. In regard to contraband he does, laying it down as a 'fundamental principle' which should be accepted by all nations 'that a belligerent may intercept whatever offers military aid to its adversary'.¹ In totalitarian war the essential foodstuffs of every belligerent country become a single store, owned or controlled by the central government, directed to serve the military or the civilian population as best may serve the single purpose of success in war. The conditions of siege are reproduced and distinction between military and civilian supplies vanishes.

¹ *International Law, chiefly as interpreted and as applied by the United States of America*, by Charles Cheney Hyde (Boston, 1922), vol. ii, pars. 803 and 805. This principle, advanced by Professor Hyde in relation to the interception of imports, is equally relevant to the interception of exports. Clearly, by exporting, Germany increases her power to purchase munitions abroad and so increases her military strength. Even apart from the justification of taking reprisals for unrestricted mine warfare, the principle, if accepted, justifies the action of Britain and France in seeking to stop all exports from Germany as well as all imports to **her**.

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Germany's Food Supplies

The third approach to the problem involves a survey of Germany's food supplies and their sources. The main facts, as derived from a memorandum prepared by the Institute of Statistics at Oxford, can be summarized as follows:

(a) In respect of bread-grains Germany is to all intents and purposes independent of overseas supplies. She produces herself the whole of her normal consumption both of rye and of wheat. In the years 1932-3 and 1934-5 she imported small quantities of wheat; in 1933-4 and 1935-6 she had an export surplus. More recently she has imported substantially: 30 to 40 million bushels a year, as compared with home production and consumption of nearly 200 million bushels. But her 1938 production was more than sufficient for her normal consumption; it can be assumed that the imports were used to build up a reserve. Even of the recent imports, a part only—about two-thirds—come from overseas. Contiguous lands, Rumania, Hungary, Yugoslavia, and Bulgaria, provided one-third, and had export surpluses which at need could easily have provided the other two-thirds.

(b) In respect of the other carbohydrates—potatoes and sugar—Germany is equally self-supporting, and she is now practically self-supporting in respect of meat. The report of the *Reichskreditgesellschaft* on the economic position of Germany in 1939, which is cited below, puts the proportion of meat supplies that needs to be imported at **not** more than 5 per cent.

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(c) In respect of fats, Germany had in normal recent times a substantial import. Of a total fat supply of 1,820,000 metric tons in 1933, 52 per cent, was imported; of a considerably larger total supply—2,101,000 metric tons—in 1938, 44 per cent, was imported. A substantial proportion of this recent importation came from overseas in the form of oil-seeds and whale oil. Before 1933 there was also a large importation of lard from the United States of America.

Germany's Fat Problem

As a possible subject of blockade, fats are on a footing different from that of any other food, and call for special examination here. For the same reason the problem of Germany's fat supply has been a matter of constant concern to her Nazi rulers, and the subject of many writings, including a full-length study of 'The German Fat Plan and its Economic Setting' by Professor Karl Brandt, formerly of Berlin and now at the Leland Stanford Food Research Institute in California.

The statistical facts essential to the present purpose are set out in the table on p. 17.

The first part of the table shows the consumption of fat as food per head of the population in the former German Reich (i.e. exclusive of Austria and later conquests) in each year from 1931 to 1938. Except for 1938, the figures are taken directly from the *Statistical Year Book* of the German Reich. For 1938 they have been taken from Mr. C. W. Guillebaud's study of *Germany's Economic Recovery*.

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Consumption and Supplies of Fat in Germany 1931-8

	1931	1932	1933	1934	1935	1936	1937	1938
1. Consumption as food in lb. per head								
Pig-fat ¹	18.5	18.7	17.9	18.3	17.0	18.1	17.9	18.5
Butter	17.2	16.5	17.2	17.2	17.2	18.7	19.6	19.2
Margarine	15.7	17.2	13.7	12.8	13.4	13.9	11.9	19.2
Other	7.7	7.7	7.5	6.6	6.0	6.0	5.7	
ALL FATS	59.1	60.1	56.3	54.9	53.6	56.7	55.1	56.9
2. Total consumption as food in thousand metric tons	1,773	1,779	1,666	1,629	1,620	1,732	1,688	1,756
3. Supplies of fat in thousand metric tons								
Home produced . . . . .	..	..	853	..	..	1,040	1,085	1,165
Imported . . . . .	..	..	967	..	..	875	854	936
TOTAL . . . . .	..	..	1,820	..	..	1,915	1,939	2,101

The second part shows the total consumption as food in thousands of metric tons. It allows for the natural growth of population in the period covered, as shown at the foot of the table. The figures are taken as in the first part from the *Statistical Year Book*, except the figure for 1938, obtained by multiplying the consumption per head in 1938 as given by Mr. Guillebaud by the estimated population of 68,072,000.

¹ The German term *Schtoeinfett* translated above as 'pig fat', though sometimes used as the equivalent of lard, is wider. In the German *Statistical Year Book* it is defined as covering *Speck* (bacon), *Flohmen* (belly-fat), and *Darmfett* (intestinal fat). The statistics of fat consumption in Germany as given above are thus not readily comparable with British statistics. The total fat in the average British diet is slightly greater than that in the average German diet, and has been considerably greater since the Nazis came to power; but a larger proportion of this total fat consumption in Britain is derived from butchers' meat (particularly mutton) and bacon or ham.

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The third part shows the total supplies of fat in Germany, as given in a report on the *Economic Condition of Germany* in the middle of 1939, published by the *Reichskreditgesellschaft* in Berlin. To make the figures comparable with those given by Mr. Guillebaud and in the first part, suet has been omitted from the table as printed in that report.

The message given by these figures is plain. The fats available for human consumption in Germany fell sharply between 1932 and 1933, as a result of import restrictions introduced in the depression of 1932. Since 1933 the consumption per head has fluctuated at a level well below that of 1932; the last year 1938 shows practically the same rate of consumption as 1933, that is to say, 56.9 lb. per head as compared with 56.3. The total amount consumed as human food is greater in the later year, as the population has increased. But the amount for human consumption, as given in the second part of the table, shows an increase between 1933 and 1938 of only 90,000 metric tons, from 1,666,000 to 1,756,000. The total supplies of fat, shown in the third part of the table, have increased much more than this, from 1,820,000 to 2,101,000 metric tons. By developing her home production Germany has more than compensated for reduction of imports and has increased her total supply of fats between 1933 and 1938 by 281,000 metric tons. But less than a third of this has been used to feed the German people. Can there be any doubt as to where the rest has gone?

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Guns instead of Butter

Every year since Herr Hitler came to power there has been more fat in Germany. Every year since Herr Hitler came to power there has been for the German people less fat than they wanted and less than they had before then. The German guns have swallowed it.

The figures tabulated here leave no doubt as to the direct diversion from human consumption to making armaments of fats which the German people would have liked to eat. But the preference—of the German Government—of guns to butter is not confined to direct diversion of fat supplies. It works indirectly also. The original restriction of fat imports in 1932 was dictated by considerations of foreign exchange; it was a measure designed to save the German mark. As Germany, released from reparation payments, recovered from the world depression, she could have used her rising purchasing power abroad to bring in more fats and to restore consumption to its pre-Nazi levels. But she has wanted and has used that purchasing power for other purposes. Guns have come before butter in the foreign exchange market as in the use of what fats she had.

British Experience 1914-18

Butter is literally not guns but propellant. Reduction of the fat supply in Germany is a necessary and practicable aim of our blockade. This does not make necessary any starvation of the civilian population.

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A minimum of fat is required for health; but, above that minimum, fat can be replaced by other foods.¹ Change of dietary is a normal incident of war. In terms of calories, the total consumption of food per man in the United Kingdom was nearly as high in 1918 as it was in the five years 1909-13, 3,358 calories per day in war as compared with 3,442 calories per day in peace; the sources from which these calories were drawn were different. The proportions in which foodstuffs of different kinds contributed to the total consumption are shown in the following table:¹

	1909-13	1918
Flour and potatoes	41.0	49.3
Meat	17.1	13.3
Fats	9.7	10.2
Sugar	13.4	8.8
Other foods	18.8	18.4
	<hr/> 100.0	<hr/> 100.0

¹ There is no general agreement as to the minimum of fat required for health. The actual consumption within the same country varies from one region to another and from one economic class to another. For Germany, Professor Kari Brandt (op. cit., pp. 127-8) gives a table showing the following extremes:

	<i>Kilograms of fat consumed per adult equivalent</i>	
	<i>North Germany</i>	<i>Bavaria</i>
White-collar worker	29.7	17.9
Labourer	28.5	11.0

The labourer, no doubt, would like to have as much fat as the white-collar worker, but under economic necessity gets on without it. As is pointed out by Professor Brandt (op. cit., p. 104), 'the human body can substitute carbohydrates for fats, for like all animals man has the ability to convert carbohydrates into fats.'

² Based on a table on p. 311 of *British Food Control*, a volume contributed by myself to the Economic and Social History of the World War, published by the Carnegie Endowment.

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In 1909-13 flour and potatoes on the one hand, and meat, fats, and sugar on the other hand, each contributed about the same proportion of the total. In 1918 the proportion contributed by flour and potatoes had risen by one-fifth and the contribution by meat, fats, and sugar had fallen by one-quarter.

A healthy diet is not a matter of calories alone; it must provide the necessary vitamins and must have a minimum of each of several types of food. But getting vitamins is a question less of quantity of food than of selection or preparation. Considerable changes of dietary, such as those shown by the table, can be made without serious hardship.

There is little doubt that during the last war the health of the British population was substantially maintained. A Committee on the Cost of Living, appointed in 1918 under the chairmanship of Lord Sumner, reached the following general conclusions:

We have found on the evidence of the budgets of working class expenditure, that, in June 1918, the working classes, as a whole, were in a position to purchase food of substantially the same nutritive value as in June 1914. Indeed our figures indicate that the families of unskilled workmen were slightly better fed at the later date, in spite of the rise in the price of food. This conclusion is more than confirmed by the reports we have obtained from the Medical Officers to the Education Authorities in the great cities. From London it is officially reported, after inspection of all the children entering school, that 'the percentage of children found in a poorly nourished condition is considerably less than half the percentage in 1913'. A similar improvement is shown by the figures furnished by Birmingham, Bolton, Bradford,

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Bristol, Glasgow, and Nottingham. The general impression, especially of the poorer children, is favourable, and the view that parents are now better able to give their children the necessary food is borne out by the information we have received as to the number of meals provided to 'necessitous children' by the local education authorities. It is only in very exceptional cases that education authorities are supplying anything like as many meals as before the war; in most places the number has fallen to about half (Nottingham, Stoke, and Sheffield) and a quarter (London and Bolton), and in some places (as in Birmingham and Liverpool) it is hardly necessary to provide meals at all. The last available figures for England and Wales, those for 1917, compared with the estimated number of 1914, show a decline by about four-fifths in the country as a whole.

This optimistic conclusion must be read subject to the comment that serious shortage of particular foods had been experienced only for a relatively short time by the date of the Committee's observations. There may have been weaknesses in the feeding of the population whose results showed themselves only later. It is clear, for instance, that the margarine at that date, whatever its calorie value, was in other respects inferior to butter and inferior to the kind of margarine that is now available. But the main conclusion of the possibility of substantial changes in the form of consumption without serious hardship is established by British experience in the last war.

The Alternatives for Germany

The problem for Germany to-day is different in one way from that of Britain in the last war. In

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Britain reduction of butter was compensated in quantity if not in quality by increase of other fats; the severest shortage was in meat and sugar. In Germany shortage of fats for human consumption has been felt even before the war, owing to the policy of the Nazi Party. If the fat ration is already so low that it cannot be further reduced without privation, the German Government may have to meet the situation by diverting fat from guns to human consumption; they cannot ask their enemy to let them escape this necessity. If the fat ration is still above the minimum required for health, it can be reduced, with a view to supplying the missing calories from another source, say bread. This raises the question whether Germany can not merely maintain her present supply of bread, but increase it.

Can Germany get more bread? Undoubtedly she can, if she makes that the first charge on her resources. With normal harvests Germany is self-supporting in bread-grains. She has been importing for a reserve; she can, if she chooses, increase her supply of bread substantially. First, she can lengthen the extraction of flour, that is to say, turn more of the wheat berry into human food and leave less as feeding-stuffs for animals. The introduction of 'war bread', as practised in Britain and in most other European countries in the last war, is a net economy, because without exception animals are wasteful converters of energy. A given quantity of grain will go farther in maintaining human life if it is consumed directly than if it is used to feed animals whose meat or milk is consumed thereafter.

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Second, Germany can increase her imports of grain from neighbouring countries. Even if they have no immediate surplus she can, if she is able and willing to pay for it, concert a programme of greater food production with neighbouring friends and neutrals. Nor is there any need for such a programme to be confined to production of grain. It can provide for supply of meat or fats.

The Working of Sea Blockade

Given normal harvests, there is little doubt that the German Government can save the civilian population of Germany from hunger, if they are prepared to devote to this purpose a sufficient share of their total resources in men, materials, and money. No British blockade can prevent this. Does that make our blockade ineffective as a weapon for success in war? It does nothing of the sort. The cutting off of Germany from overseas supplies is likely to be as decisive an element in the present war as it was in the last war. The sea blockade works in three ways.

First, it deprives Germany of certain articles, other than foodstuffs, which are essential for war and cannot be replaced by substitutes on any adequate scale. Oil, nickel, and rubber are obvious leaders in this class, and the list could be extended. This is an internal combustion war—a war of aeroplanes, tanks, and submarines. It is in the materials for internal combustion that Germany without sea imports is irremediably deficient.

Second, the blockade deprives Germany of a

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substantial proportion of that which is both an essential food and an important munition of war, namely fats. The possibility of making glycerine out of sugar or grain in place of fats does not affect the argument. These are also foods. The possibility, in so far as for Germany it is a practical possibility, of making propellants from cellulose without any glycerine at all, points to the third and most general purpose of blockade.

This third purpose is, by restricting Germany's activities in every possible way, to drive her to exhaustion. Germany can increase her home production of food or her import of food if necessary, but to do either means taking men out of the firing line or the munition factories into the fields or the export industries." Moreover, the making of substitutes, and the finding of alternative sources of supply for an article whose normal supplies have been cut off, even when it is possible at all, is wasteful of man-power or materials. Petrol can be extracted from coal in place of being imported, but the process is elaborate and costly, in plant and labour. Alcohol, acetone, and glycerine can be made from wheat, but wheat is an extravagantly costly article to use for such a purpose. Propellant can be made without glycerine, but for a country without unlimited supplies of pure cellulose, to use glycerine is almost certainly the easier way. Food production, to take another case, depends largely on fertilizers. The most important material of fertilizers—namely nitrates—explosives. Germany,

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can and does manufacture them from the nitrogen of the air by using steam and coal; in a long war consuming much explosive, she is likely to be short of fertilizers. In allocating nitrates as between fertilizer and explosive she will have the problem of butter or guns in another form. Importation of food would ease this problem and allow more nitrates to become explosives.

The Dilemma of Totalitarian War

The special purpose of economic warfare is to make the process of finding substitutes for normal supplies as costly as possible in men or money or shipping. If Germany is able to import any particular article, she will import it only if it is easier to import than to make at home. 'Easier' means releasing power for her main task of defeating her enemies. It is fantastic to suggest that they have a duty to help her to this end. The central principle of war is to discover what the enemy most wants to do and stop him from doing it if one can. The alternative of butter or propellant is only a special case of the general dilemma, which it is the object of every belligerent to-day to produce for the enemy: the choice between underfeeding his people and underfeeding his guns. It is to this choice that the German Government are seeking to drive us; to this choice we must seek to drive them. But the final choice rests with the Government of the country concerned. If the civilian population of Germany or any part of it goes short of essential food in this war, that will be by decision of the Nazi

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Party, because the Government divert so much of their total resources of man-power and foreign exchange and food-supplies to making and using munitions as to starve their own women and children. That is what the German Government did in 1914-18. The German Government of to-day may be expected to repeat this brutal and fatal error. But that will be their decision, not a necessary consequence of the British blockade.

In the five years before 1914, the annual consumption in Germany of food and feeding-stuffs together represented 259,000 milliards of calories, of which only 10 per cent, was imported.¹ The fact that nevertheless the scarcity of food became so serious during the war is attributed by the distinguished author of this estimate to four main causes. First, owing to the conscription of millions of peasants and agricultural labourers, the crops became continually poorer. Second, the food requirements of the army were extravagant. Third, while the rationing of food for human beings was fairly efficient in the towns, it was inefficient in the rural districts. Fourth, the food requirements of animals, which before the war had consumed two-thirds of all the calories, were not adequately curtailed. The hardships of the German civilian population in 1914-18 were the result, less of the British blockade directly, than of general exhaustion brought on by

¹ *Deutschlands Versorgung mit Nahrungs- und Futtermitteln* by R. Kuczynski (Berlin, 1927). The estimate is in Part IV, p. 60. The explanations of scarcity were given by the author in a letter to me; he lived through the **last war** in Germany.

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all the operations of war, of mismanagement, and of placing military demands before civilian needs. The same causes, unaffected by the changed circumstances of the present war, may be expected in due course to produce the same results.

A British Government in the same position would not be likely to make the same errors of sacrificing the home front for the military front. Moreover, a British Government, in so far as they had to call upon the civilian population for sacrifices to maintain the military front, could ask for greater sacrifices without losing support; their decisions are those of the people themselves. The argument brings to light one advantage of democracy, which in the last resort should be decisive. A democracy is less likely than a dictatorship to crack under the internal strain of totalitarian war. The test of this issue may already be at hand. With the passage of the Neutrality Act in the United States, there is nothing that can prevent Britain and her Allies from obtaining in due course an overwhelming supply of aeroplanes, ships, and other armaments, except the difficulty of paying for them in foreign currency. Every cent or other foreign currency saved on paying for food from abroad can make more certain and earlier the victory of the Allies. Once this point is made clear to the British people, and once fair play to all is guaranteed by rationing, there will be no difficulty in securing from them acceptance of almost any restriction whatever upon their personal comforts, and everything but the barest necessities. They will demand guns rather than butter.

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Fallacy of the Soviet Protest

This argument shows, finally, that the parallel drawn by the Soviet Government between killing civilians by bombing unprotected towns and killing them by hunger blockade is false. The German Government could protect German civilians against starvation by blockade, by using their resources to that end, as the British Government can and will protect the British people. Neither Government can protect its women and children completely from air-raids. Those who die thus will be killed by the enemy, not by decision of their rulers.

The reasoning of the Soviet Note, given near the beginning of this paper, rests on three distinctions, of which two are untenable, while the third is threadbare. The two untenable distinctions are those between food and munitions, and between food for the fighting forces and food for the rest of the population. The third distinction, threadbare rather than wholly untenable, is that between those engaged in war and the 'peaceful population'¹. The Soviet Note, so weak in argument, is in reality addressed not to Britain but across the new Russian border into Germany. It features the Soviet as the one friend of the toiling masses in all countries. It is ground-bait for Communism, designed in due course to turn the 'peaceful population' of Germany into faithful slaves of the Comintern.

The protest of the German Government against the British 'hunger blockade' has the same character. It is bad argument, as its authors know better than

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most people, but they hope that it will be good propaganda. In so far as it is believed in neutral countries, it may embarrass Britain's conduct of the war or deprive her of valuable sympathies. It is one of Germany's weapons in war, not less legitimate than many others which she uses, needing to be dealt with like other weapons, needing to be met and broken by stronger weapons of fact and of argument.

Conclusion

The results of this examination of blockade possibilities and policy can be summarized as follows:

The exclusion from Germany, so far as possible, of imports of the one kind of food of which she has inadequate home production—namely fats—is a necessary measure of war, because fats are directly convertible into armaments.

The exclusion from Germany, so far as possible, of all imports of all kinds, including grain, is justifiable as a general restriction of enemy activities, directed, not to starving the civilian population, but to preventing the enemy Government from feeding adequately both their people and their guns. Nothing that we can do by way of blockade is likely to make it impossible for the German Government to feed their civilian population adequately, if they devote to this purpose a sufficient portion of their total resources of man-power, materials, and money; if they do not do so, the Germans people will be reduced to hunger by decision of their own Government.

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If, in terms of the Soviet Note of 25 October, regard is had not to the civilian population but to that part of the population which can fairly be described as 'peaceful', the case is clearer still. Unquestionably any of the belligerent nations to-day can make certain that the owners of useless mouths—their women and children, their sick and aged—do not starve, if they are prepared to feed these mouths, even at the cost of losing the war. To say, as the Soviet Government say, that some act of war is contrary to international law, amounts to saying that it should not be done, even if it appears to afford the last hope of victory. There is a formally admitted obligation of this kind in respect of the use of gas or of bacteriological warfare or the deliberate bombing of open towns. If there is any similar obligation in respect of the feeding of the useless mouths, the obligation rests upon the Government which can fulfil it, the Government of the blockaded country, and not on the enemy Government, which has no such power. Nothing that Britain is able to do can either prevent German women and children from being fed or secure that they are fed. That decision lies in the hands of the Nazi Party and of their Soviet friends.

PUBLISHER'S NOTE

FOR those who wish to read *in* more detail about the background and causes of the present state of the world,, the following notes may be of some assistance.

The best and most up-to-date general picture of England as she was from the rise of Germany *in* 1870 to the outbreak of the First World War is given *in* Mr. Ensor's book *England 18'70-1:914* (15s.)' which is Volume 14 of the new *Oxford History of England*. A reliable German account of German foreign policy during the same period is given *in* E. Brandenburg's *From Bismarck to the World War* (trans. by A. E. Adams, 15s.)' Mr. C. R. M. F. Cruttwell's *History of the Great War 1914-1918* (15\$.-) may be recommended as the standard one-volume work on the subject, Mr. G. M. Gathorne-Hardy deals with the period between the two wars in his *Short History of International Affairs, 1920-1938* (8s' 6d.), a book issued under the auspices of the Royal Institute of International Affairs.

The two volumes of *Speeches and Documents on International Affairs*, edited by Professor A. B. Keith (World's Classics, 2s each), and the selection of political writings in Sir Alfred Zimmern's *Modern Political Doctrines* (ys. 6d.) illustrate the conflict of doctrines so much in evidence to-day.

(Mr. Ensor, Mr. Gathorne-Hardy, and Sir Alfred Zimmern are authors of Oxford Pamphlets, see back of cover.)

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