

FOOD DEFENCE

IMPORTS AND THEIR CONTROL

II.—THE HELP OF THE TRADERS

From Our Special Correspondent

To prevent any interruption of the flow of imports during a possible war the various supply organizations under their expert directors would make the necessary arrangements, prepared beforehand, for the purchase of oversea supplies. No doubt there would be different methods of buying, according to the conditions in each producing country. In certain cases there would probably be negotiations for the bulk purchase of cereals, meat, sugar, dairy produce, and other foodstuffs on long-term contracts. It may be recalled that food defence questions were discussed at last year's Imperial Conference, when a useful exchange of information took place between the representatives of the United Kingdom on the one hand, and of the oversea supplying countries on the other. There would be no panic buying at any prices asked. Since the Government would be the sole purchaser, and this country is the largest food importing country in the world, it should be possible to negotiate on reasonable terms with potential suppliers. Where bulk purchases were not possible or desirable, purchases in the country of origin could be made by private firms acting as agents of the food controller, or by buying commissions. There is in progress a detailed study of the whole question of oversea sources of supply and the possibility of finding alternative sources to meet deficiencies that may arise in time of war.

We should necessarily have to look to oversea sources for a big proportion of our food supplies. At present it is estimated that a little more than half our total meat supplies, about 70 per cent. of our cheese and sugar, nearly 80 per cent. of our fruit, and about 90 per cent. of our cereals and fats are imported. The Advisory Committee on Nutrition has estimated that in terms of energy value or calorie equivalent home production represents about 40 per cent. of total consumption; although, reckoned in terms of retail value, it has been estimated that home-produced food is nearly half the total supply. The report of the Nutrition Committee also comments on the important fact that home-produced livestock products—meat, eggs, and dairy produce—depend to a considerable extent on imported feeding stuffs. It is roughly estimated that about a quarter of the home-produced meat and milk is produced from imported feeding stuffs.

FIXED PRICES

So the food controller in time of war would concentrate at once on maintaining our imported supplies. It would be necessary to see that ships were available to transport food to our ports, and another department of the Board of Trade has plans in hand to this end. Whatever method of oversea purchase was adopted, the existing importers would continue to handle imports as Government agents. The next stage would be the allocation to manufacturers at fixed prices

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Times, 28.1.38.

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FOOD DEFENCE

A SHIELD IN TIME OF WAR

I.—THE STATE PLAN IN OUTLINE

From Our Special Correspondent

Sir William Beveridge, writing in *The Times* nearly a year ago on "The Home Front in War," likened passive defence to the shield which is complementary to the sword of military preparedness. Since we have decided to face our defence problems in peacetime as free men and not as the subjects of an authoritarian State, progress may be jerky and often unsatisfactory, but the fashioning of the shield goes on. If its protective qualities are still far from what could be desired there is compensation to be found in the spirit in which it is being wrought and toughened.

The aspect of passive defence to which public attention has been mainly directed so far is that of air raid precautions. Articles in *The Times* of January 10, 11, and 12 told of the mood and the manner in which central and local authorities are dealing with that problem. Not nearly so much has been heard of the plans for feeding the population if war should come, and on this subject there are signs of growing public uneasiness. It is only too evident that in modern war the whole nation will march on its stomach. The country naturally looks to the Government for assurance that, so far as it is humanly possible to provide, the calamity of war shall not find the nation in a position in which its will can be paralysed either by the bombing or by the starvation of the civil population. Within the bounds set by the policy so far adopted by the Government a great deal has been done to organize food supplies in time of war. Even if an emergency arose this week we should not be found wholly unprepared. Within a year, when still more details have been filled in, the organization should be fairly complete.

A SHADOW ORGANIZATION

The most prominent points for criticism in public discussion of food plans in relation to defence are (1) the absence of any announcement of a Government decision about the storage of food reserves, and (2) the supposed inadequacy of the agricultural programme for securing a big increase of home-grown food supplies. With regard to the first point the Minister for the Coordination of Defence has stated that the question of food storage has been examined in the greatest detail and that all the information is available for the Government to take a decision. It may be that there are arguments of substance against storage on the scale which some authorities have suggested, and that it would be more prudent to concentrate on the provision of a less ambitious scheme sufficient to cover the risk of the temporary dislocation that might be caused by the first shock of war and air bombardment. In any event the beginning of the accumulation of reserves is probably a matter of timing to be related to the international situation. Food policy must also be fitted into and