

Times  
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## OIL IN WARTIME

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EFFECTIVE CONTROL  
OF SUPPLIES

TO THE EDITOR OF THE TIMES

Sir,—I have read with much interest the article on "Oil in Wartime" which appeared in your issue of December 7; and shall be grateful if you will allow me to make a few gentle criticisms of some of the statements to be found therein.

There seems to be some confusion between the financial control of a company and the effective control of a company. The effective control, if the works are situated in a foreign country, remains exclusively in the hands of the Government of that country; even if we had 100 per cent. financial control instead of the 20 per cent. claimed. With the neutrality laws already in existence, or liable to be called into existence in time of war, with the exception of the almost negligible amount coming from British Possessions, the whole of our oil supplies are dependent on the good will of the country whence they come.

To say we are more favourably situated than the other great European Powers, save Russia, in the matter of our oil supplies, gives me very little comfort. The whole of our Navy, and half of our merchant navy, are entirely dependent on oil for their mobility. Other nations can keep their ships in harbour; but we, for our very existence, depend on our ships being at sea, and able to keep the sea.

Your Correspondent gives 15,000,000 tons of oil as our probable wartime expenditure, certainly not an exaggerated estimate, unless, as is very possible, all oil-burning merchant ships are laid up at the commencement of hostilities so as to save our oil supplies for naval requirements. The tanker tonnage he gives as 4,330,000, that is to say, when the much reduced mercantile tonnage now possessed by Great Britain is analysed, 4,330,000 tons of it is employed on half-time work. What does this leave for the other vital needs of the Empire?

I confess I have difficulty in accepting the calculations of even the most celebrated economists when they work out that our tanker sinkings cannot exceed 300,000 tons a year. Also this comparative security is to be obtained by convoy. What vessels are to be employed in conveying tankers, to and fro, from British ports to the Persian Gulf, which the writer says must be *via* the Cape of Good Hope, 12,000 miles; or to the Gulf of Mexico, 4,000 miles? And what is the proposed organization of these convoys? Are they to sail, say, a dozen tankers in company? And with these great distances how is it proposed that they can all do "only eight round trips a year"!

Our agreed yearly allowance requires a safe weekly arrival in British ports of 300,000 tons.

It is no help in discussion for the writer to say "it is certain that the shipping of oil to the western coasts of France and Great Britain, both practically on the Atlantic itself, would be a comparatively simple matter."

It is interesting to have an authoritative statement as to why it is not necessary to find oil in the British Isles. I must say I would willingly put up with the risks and inconveniences which your Correspondent thinks would ensue from oil-wells situated in our islands, as I cannot think the risks to the pumping machinery by attacks from aircraft can be comparable to the risks every oiler will run every time it passes through the danger zone.

I have the honour to be, Sir,  
Your obedient servant,  
HOWARD KELLY, Admiral.  
13, Halsey Street, S.W.3.